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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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# SP quits MVA after Babri post by Uddhav's aide

## As differences crop up, questions arise on INDIA bloc's future

**MUMBAI, 7 DEC**

Samajwadi Party (SP) on Saturday announced its departure from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), an Opposition alliance in Maharashtra, following a post from the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) that praised the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992.

This move comes from SP, which has two members in the 288-member strong Maharashtra Assembly, and has been facing criticism for its alignment with the alliance.

The impact of the SP's exit is expected to be minimal for the MVA, which suffered a significant defeat in the Assembly elections, securing only 50 out of 288 seats. Nevertheless, this development reflects ongoing discontent among regional parties within the Congress-led INDIA bloc.

Political analysts feel that while the SP's exit is unlikely to harm the MVA directly due to its limited presence in the state, it could be a strategic move ahead of upcoming civic body elections.

Uddhav Thackeray Sharad Pawar and Akhilesh Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

The announcement was made by SP MLA Abu Azmi after a local newspaper published an advertisement congratulating those involved in the Babri Masjid demolition. Additionally, a post by a close aide of Uddhav Thackeray, MLC Milind Narvekar, celebrated the act, further aggravating tensions.

Expressing displeasure, Azmi said, "If anyone in the MVA speaks such language, what is the difference between BJP and them? Why should we stay with them?" "Congress has to decide whether it can ally with someone who speaks like this," he sad SP's decision also highlights the broader tensions within the national INDIA bloc, which has seen increasing dissatisfaction from various regional parties.

This follows recent comments from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who expressed her intent to take a more prominent role within the alliance amid electoral setbacks for the Congress in other states including Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir and now Maharashtra. *—PTI*

### EVM row: MVA MLAs skip taking oath

**Mumbai, 7 Dec**

Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Saturday decided not to take oath as MLAs on the first day of the special three-day session of the Maharashtra Assembly alleging misuse of EVMs in the recently-held state polls. The special session of the Lower House of the state legislature began here at 11 am. *—PTI*

***>>>More on Page 3***

AMID ESCALATING TENSIONS

The incident occurred in Dhour village, where local authorities have initiated a manhunt to apprehend the perpetrators ***PHOTO: X/ @RADHARAMNDAS***

# ISKCON temple set ablaze, idols damaged in B'desh

**DHAKA/KOLKATA, 7 DEC**

- Tensions between India and Bangladesh have escalated following a series of attacks on Hindus, particularly after the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

An ISKCON temple in Dhaka district, Bangladesh, was set ablaze early on Saturday by a group of unidentified individuals. While ISKCON Bangladesh described the structure as a "family temple" owned by a devotee, the Kolkata office of ISKCON reported that the "ISKCON Namhatta Centre" was targeted.

The incident occurred in Dhour village, near the Turag police station, where local authorities have initiated a manhunt to apprehend the perpetrators. Charu Chandra Das Brahmachary, general secretary of ISKCON Bangladesh, stated that the fire, which was quickly extinguished, caused damage to an idol and destroyed curtains. However, ISKCON Kolkata vice president Radharamn Das detailed a more severe situation, claiming that multiple idols at the Namhatta Centre were completely destroyed.

Das reported that the fire was ignited by lifting the tin roof and using petrol or octane to fuel the flames. He condemned the violence, noting that the attacks targeted the Shri Shri Radha Krishna Temple and the Shri Shri Mahabhagya Lakshmi Narayan Temple within the Hare Krishna Namhatta Sangha. Tensions between India and Bangladesh have escalated following a series of attacks on Hindus, particularly after the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, who is connected to ISKCON. His recent arrest has led to protests in India and increased concerns for his safety. In Assam, the Barak Valley Hotel and Restaurant Association announced a boycott of Bangladeshi nationals until minority attacks cease, reflecting rising sentiments in the region. *—PTI*

***>>>More on Page 3***

Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher addresses a press conference at the Shambhu Border, in Patiala on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

# Farmers to resume Delhi Chalo march today

**CHANDIGARH, 7 DEC**

Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher announced on Saturday that a group of 101 farmers will commence a march to Delhi on 8 December, as they have yet to receive any communication from the Centre regarding talks to address their grievances. This follows a previous attempt to march to the national capital, which was quelled by security forces using tear gas at the Punjab-Haryana border, resulting in injuries to 16 farmers.

Pandher reported that one individual has suffered permanent hearing loss due to the clashes, stating, "We have not received any message from the Centre for holding talks." He accused the Narendra Modi government of being unwilling to engage in dialogue. The farmers, represented by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, are advocating for various demands, including a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP).

The farmers' march on Friday was forcefully halted by security personnel, prompting claims from Pandher that the BJP government has been "exposed" by its actions. Meanwhile, fellow farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal is maintaining a hunger strike at the Khanauri border, having reportedly lost eight kilograms. The Haryana government has since suspended mobile internet and bulk SMS services in 11 villages of Ambala district, further escalating tensions. In addition to demanding MSP, farmers are calling for a farm debt waiver, pensions, a halt to electricity tariff hikes and the withdrawal of police cases. *—PTI*

BOOST TO NAVY

## RAJNATH SET FOR 3 DAY RUSSIA TOUR, TO COMMISSION WARSHIP

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is set to embark on a three-day visit to Russia starting this Sunday, during which he will witness the commissioning of the INS Tushil, a multi-role stealth guided missile frigate, into the Indian Navy. The ceremony is scheduled for Monday in Kaliningrad, where the warship, touted as one of the world's most advanced frigates, is expected to enhance India's operational capacity in the Indian Ocean amid rising Chinese activity. As part of the official visit, Singh will co-chair the 21st meeting of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC) in Moscow. *—PTI*

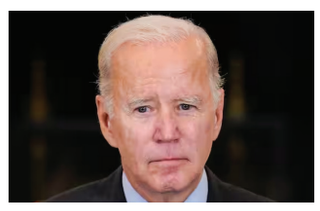
# US junks BJP's charge of backing anti-India agenda

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

The United States has dismissed allegations from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) asserting that US-funded organisations were attempting to destabilise India through targeted attacks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and business mogul Gautam Adani. A spokesperson at the US embassy expressed disappointment over the BJP's claims, stating that the US government has consistently championed media freedom globally.

The BJP accused the US deep state of colluding with the media platform OCCRP (Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project) and opposition leader Rahul Gandhi in an effort to tarnish India's image. The BJP specifically pointed to Gandhi's utilisation of OCCRP reports to critique the Adani Group and its perceived links to the government.

PM Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**



US Prez Joe Biden **PHOTO: PTI**

"It's disappointing that the ruling party in India would make these kinds of accusations," the US embassy spokesperson stated. They emphasised that the US government collaborates with independent organisations to enhance the professional development and training of journalists, asserting that this support does not dictate editorial choices.

OCCRP, based in Amsterdam, primarily focuses on issues of crime and corruption. The BJP referenced a French media report alleging that OCCRP is funded by the US State Department's USAID, along with contributions from figures like George Soros and the Rockefeller Foundation.

The spokesperson reiterated, "A free and independent press is an essential component of any democracy, enabling informed and constructive debate and holding those in power accountable." *—PTI*

### Mumbai police gets threat to Modi's life

**MUMBAI, 7 DEC**

Mumbai Police on Saturday received a message threatening to kill Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an official said. The number from which the message was sent was traced to Ajmer in Rajasthan and a police team was sent there immediately to nab the suspect, said an official. The WhatsApp message, received on the helpline of the traffic police in the early hours, mentioned two ISI agents and a plot to carry out a bomb blast to target Modi, he said. The investigators suspect that the sender is a mentally disturbed person or was under the influence of alcohol but further probe was on, the official added. *— PTI*

### 100-day long TB elimination drive launched

**RANCHI, 7 DEC**

A 100-day-long tuberculosis (TB) elimination campaign was launched in Jharkhand on Saturday to quickly detect and treat TB patients. Union Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth unveiled the campaign from Ranchi's Sadar Hospital in presence of Ranchi legislator CP Singh, state Health Secretary Ajoy Kumar Singh and other officials. Under the programme, an intensive campaign will be carried out in four Jharkhand districts—Gumla, Simdega, Ramgarh and Hazaribag—that have been selected among 347 districts across the country by the central government to find and treat missing TB cases, especially in high-risk groups, and reduce TB deaths significantly, an official said. *— PTI*

INSURGENTS TAKEOVER

# *MEA asks Indians not to travel to Syria, leave at the earliest*

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

In light of escalating violence in Syria, primarily due to advances by Islamist-led rebels, the Indian government has issued an advisory urging its citizens to refrain from travelling to the war-torn nation. For those currently in Syria, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has advised exercising "utmost precaution" and minimising movement.

The advisory comes after reports indicated that rebel forces are gaining ground, having nearly seized the central city of Homs while also capturing significant portions of Aleppo, Syria's largest city. This has led to tens of thousands fleeing Homs amidst the turmoil.

The MEA strongly recommends that Indians in Syria consider leaving at the earliest opportunity via commercial flights. The government is also encouraging continued communication with the Indian embassy in Damascus for updates on the situation.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal **PHOTO: PTI**

- The Indian government is closely monitoring the unfolding situation and has reiterated its commitment to the welfare of its citizens abroad.

"In view of the current situation in Syria, Indian nationals are advised to avoid all travel to Syria until further notice," the MEA stated. "Those who can should depart as soon as feasible, while others must prioritise their safety and limit their movements."

As of now, approximately 90 Indian nationals are believed to be in Syria, including 14 affiliated with various UN organisations. "Our mission remains in close contact with our nationals to ensure their safety and security," remarked MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal. *—PTI*

***>>>More on Page 6***

Defectors line-up to register their details with Syrian insurgents in Aleppo, Syria **PHOTO: PTI**

### Syrian insurgents circle Damascus

Syrian insurgents have reached the suburbs of Damascus as part of a rapidly moving offensive that has seen them take over some of Syria's largest cities, Opposition activists and a rebel commander said on Saturday. Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an Opposition war monitor, said insurgents are now active in the Damascus suburbs of Maadamiyah, Jaramana and Daraya. *—PTI*

## Ismael, henchman of gangster Bannanje Raja, dies

BELAGAVI, 7 DEC

KM Ismael, a henchman of gangster Bannaje Raja, died on the way to government hospital after he developed a respiratory problem in Belagavi on Saturday. Ismael and Mangaluru-based Raja were undergoing life imprisonment at Hindalaga jail in Belagavi for killing Karwar-based business tycoon RN Nayak in Karwar town. Raja suspected foul play behind the death of Ismael. Ismael had heart problems twice in jail and was said to be suffering from respiratory problems. As his breathing problem worsened on Saturday, the jail authority shifted him to Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences where he was declared dead. —*Salar News*

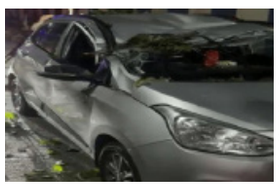


PHOTO: SALAR

## Narrow escape for family as tree branch falls on car

BENGALURU, 7 DEC

Four members of a family, including a minor, had a lucky escape after a large tree branch fell on their car near Palace Road late on Saturday night. The incident occurred around 11pm when the family was returning to their home in RT Nagar after attending a function. The driver of the car sustained minor injuries, while the other passengers were unharmed, sources said. Traffic police stationed nearby assisted the family and alerted Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) officials. To prevent further disruptions, police diverted traffic to alternate routes while BBMP personnel worked to remove the broken branch from the road. The incident has raised concerns about the stability of ageing trees in the city, particularly in high-traffic areas
—*Salar News*

## CESC announces power cut in Mysuru on 10 Dec

MYSURU, 7 DEC

CESC has announced that power supply will be disrupted on 10 December from 10am to 5.30pm due to third quarterly maintenance works at the Bannimantap 66/11KV station. The areas affected include Kesare First and Second Stage, Subashnagar, Shobha Garden, R S Naidunagar, N R Garden, Belavetha, Shyadanahalli, K RM III Colony, Varuna Canal, Siddalingapura, Kalasthawadi, Lakshmipura, SS Nagar, Kaverinagar, Siddiqnagar, Hanumanthanagar, Mother Box, Highway Circle, KSRTC Depot, Haleemnagar, JSS Dental College, and St Joseph Hospital, as per a release from the CESC sub division office in NR Mohalla. —*Salar News*

## Use Suraksha app for assistance from police: Dayananda

BENGALURU, 7 DEC

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda has appealed to the women to download Suraksha app and use it during emergencies to get timely assistance from police."When stuck in an emergency, use Bengaluru City Police's Suraksha App. Press the red button on the app to trigger police and to alert your family and friends," he said. Dayananda was speaking during a women's safety awareness programme organised by Bengaluru Police, Change Makers of Kanakapura Road Association and Smitham NGO at Sri Hari Khoday Center for Performing Arts here on Saturday. Around 1,500 women, including students and professionals, attended the programme. Dayananda and Deputy Commissioner of Police South, Lokesh Jagalasar, along with other senior officials led the session and heard the grievances of participants. **Suraksha app is available in Google Playstore.** —*Salar News*

# Action on Covid 'scam' will be taken based on facts: DKS

### Gave free hand to officials to probe irregularities, says DyCM

BENGALURU, 7 DEC

Sending out a stern warning that the culprits of Covid scam would not be spared, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said officials would be interrogated as per the recommendations of Justice Michael D'Cunha Committee on Covid. "We are reviewing the report and have instructed officials to take necessary action within the legal framework and based on facts," Shivakumar said.

"As per the recommendations of the Committee report, we will be interrogating many officials too. The Committee has also recommended filing criminal complaints against some," he said. "Our government also doesn't agree with the report that there was no human error in the tragic death of 36 people in Chamarajanagar hospital. We will investigate the case again. The then minister had said that only 3 people had died due to oxygen shortage," he said. "We will take stock of the investigation in Belagavi. We have given a free hand to officials to investigate Covid irregularities."

–*Salar News with Agencies*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and others at a Cabinet sub-committee meeting in Bengaluru on Saturday PHOTO: X

### Cabinet holds meet on Covid report

State Cabinet sub-committee held a meeting on Saturday to discuss the actions that could be taken on the report submitted by Justice Michael D'Cunha related to alleged Covid irregularities. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Home Minister G Parameshwara, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao and others were present in the meeting.The report submitted by Justice D'Cunha had claimed that then BJP government did not utilise Rs 447 crore allocated for relief works and healthcare during Covid-19.The report also alleged that the then government had sent Covid-19 samples to unqualified private labs which led to an expenditure of Rs 6 crore. —*ANI*

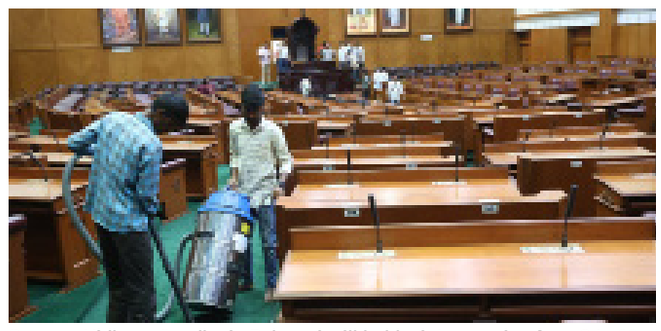
## NO PACT ON POWER SHARING, SAYS SHIVAKUMAR

BENGALURU, 7 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivkumar on Saturday said no one in the party should talk about any power-sharing "agreement or formula" involving him and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, as he clarified that there was no such a thing. He, however, said that they were working with some "political understanding". This statement from Shivakumar, who is also the State Congress chief, came days after Siddaramaiah rejected his claim that they have a power-sharing pact. "I have never spoken about any formula, there is nothing. What I told the national channel is we have come to some understanding. The CM has been entrusted with some responsibility and I'm entrusted with some. I'm functioning accordingly," Shivakumar said —*PTI*

9-20 DEC

# Govt allots Rs 19.3 cr for winter session of legislature in Belagavi



Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi will hold winter session from 9 to 20 December PHOTO: SALAR

BELAGAVI, 7 DEC

State government has allotted Rs 19.3 crore for the winter session of legislature which will be held at Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi from 9 to 20 December.

Belagavi will hold a session for 13th time and a total of Rs 154.3 crore was spent for all of them.

Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan said the budget would increase by 10% during every session and the administration would try to reduce the expenditures.

The government has released Rs 13.8 crore for Belagavi district administration and Rs 5.5 crore for police department. Besides, PWD, Transport, HESCOM, Food and Civil Supplies Departments would also use the funds for the session.

DC Roshan said most of the funds would go for lodging and for food.

Belagavi police commissioner Yada Martin said the amount given to the department covers all expenditure, including stay, food, transportation and health checkups.

—*Salar News*

PAWSOME PARADE!

Pet lovers and their furry companions stole the spotlight at the Pet Fed Show at Jayamahal Palace in Bengaluru on Saturday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

## CM ASSURES ACTION ON MATERNAL DEATHS

C'NAGAR, 7 DEC

With the number of maternal deaths in Ballari rising to five, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said action will be taken against the guilty based on the report by an expert committee, headed by the Development Commissioner, inquiring into it. Last month, four women died in Ballari. Another patient, who was undergoing treatment at Ballari Medical College and Research Centre (BMCRC), died on Thursday night.

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Saturday paid a visit to the family of the deceased, who passed away while receiving treatment at District Hospital.

Meanwhile, BJP led by ex-minister B Sriramulu held a protest in Ballari, accusing the government of not taking the deaths seriously, and holding it responsible. —*PTI*

# I am now at fag end of my political career: CM

MYSURU, 7 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said he is now at the fag end of his political journey and would be difficult to survive in politics without the support, love and affection of the people.

He was speaking after opening a renovated government school at Sattegala in Chamarajanagar district which has been funded by old students after former DGP Mariswamy, an alumnus, launched a drive.

Siddaramaiah said former chief minister JH Patel, a rationalist, hesitated to visit Chamarajanagar, fearing the jinx of losing power. But he visited the district more than 20 times, including as Chief Minister twice, without giving importance to superstition. Siddaramaiah said he has become politically stronger after visiting Chamarajanagar.

Remembering the contributions of BR Ambedkar for building an equal society, and ensuring equal rights and opportunities to all citizens, the Chief Minister wanted people to give importance to education to come to the mainstream of the society.

—*Salar News*

Siddaramaiah PHOTO: PTI

- Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said it would be difficult to survive in politics without the support, love and affection of the people

Thaawarchand Gehlot PHOTO: PTI

## DONATE TO ARMED FORCES FLAG DAY FUND: GOVERNOR

BENGALURU, 7 DEC

Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Saturday called upon citizens to contribute generously to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund, which supports the welfare and rehabilitation of war widows, ex-servicemen and their families.

He made the appeal during the Armed Forces Flag Day programme held at Raj Bhavan.

Gehlot paid tribute to the brave soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice to uphold the sovereignty and integrity of the nation, according to an official statement.

"The Indian Army has a distinguished legacy and is recognised as one of the finest armies in the world," the Governor remarked.

The Governor also commended the modernisation of the armed forces, stating, "Today, our army is equipped with modern technology and advanced weaponry, and we take immense pride in this progress."

He urged NGOs, industrialists, and corporate bodies to actively participate in supporting ex-servicemen and their families by formulating assistance programmes. Contributions to the Armed Forces Flag Day Fund help address essential needs such as education, medical care, and rehabilitation for those who have served the nation.

During the event, the Governor unveiled the Armed Forces Flag and a QR code for convenient. —*PTI*

CRIME SHEET

# *Techie loses Rs 3 crore through online gaming*

BENGALURU, 7 DEC

A City-based software engineer has said he lost Rs 3 crore on an online gaming platform named Packet 52.

Nishant Srivastava filed a complaint with Central Division of Cyber Economic and Narcotics police under section 66 of IT Act (dishonest and fraudulent activity-computer related offences) and section 318(2) (cheating by impersonation) of BNS.

Srivastava created an account on the Packet 52 platform in April last year, according to the complaint. The techie claimed over time, he noticed suspicious activities, including disproportionate losses, arbitrary restrictions on fund withdrawals, and the removal of a key feature — hand history — that would allow users to track gameplay.

In December 2023, Packet 52 acknowledged the presence of fraudulent activities on its platform but failed to resolve user grievances. Some players were consistently winning large sums while others incurred significant losses, suggesting unethical practices by the firm.

Nirdesh Networks Private Limited, managing the app, is involved in fraudulent practices and lacks transparency in its operations, the cyber police said. The CEOs of Packet 52 and Gamesaw Craft, another associated company, were booked. —*Salar News*

### CCB raids courier agencies ahead of New Year celebrations

In a bid to ramp up anti-narcotics efforts prior to New Year celebrations, the Central Crime Branch (CCB) police launched a series of raids on several courier agencies in the city early on Saturday morning. The operation, led by the anti-narcotics unit and supported by sniffer dogs, aimed to inspect both local and international parcels for illegal substances. A senior CCB official informed Salar News that inspections commenced around 5.30am in areas including Chamarajpet, Kalasipalya, and Sampangi Ramanagar, continuing until 5pm. Thus far, no narcotics have been found. This initiative aligns with a broader citywide crackdown on drug trafficking as authorities remain vigilant during the festive season. —*Salar News*

Central Crime Branch PHOTO: PTI

### Karnataka police launches app to combat drug abuse

BENGALURU, 7 DEC

In an effort to address the pressing concerns of drug-related activities, the Karnataka State Police has unveiled a new mobile app, Drug Free Karnataka, aimed at curbing drug abuse and trafficking. Available on the Google Play Store, the app encourages public involvement in the state's fight against drugs.

Users can confidentially report information regarding drug cultivation, synthetic drug laboratories, peddlers, transportation networks, and usage through the app, with submissions accepted in both English and Kannada. Reports will be directed to local police or supervisory officers, including Deputy Commissioners of Police in urban centres like Bengaluru, Mangaluru, and Mysuru, as well as Superintendents of Police in district areas.

Upon receiving a report, police officials will verify its authenticity before taking necessary action, which may include conducting raids. The app also offers educational resources that detail the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985, outlining penalties for various offences, safety precautions, and the detrimental effects of narcotics. This initiative aims to empower citizens to collaborate with law enforcement in fostering a drug-free Karnataka

—*Salar News*

## Police seize 1.5 tonnes of illegally transported beef

Police detained two people REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO: PTI

City police have seized around 1.5 tonnes of beef allegedly being transported illegally in two separate incidents on Saturday and detained two people. In the first case, Amruthahalli police acted on a tip-off regarding a car transporting illegal beef. The vehicle was intercepted near Hebbal flyover while en route to KR Puram. Upon inspection, more than 1.1 tonnes of beef was discovered inside the car.In a related incident, Chikkajala police inspected another suspicious vehicle that had broken down near Chikkajala. The inspection revealed 400kg of beef being transported from a slaughterhouse in Allipura, located in Chikkaballapura district. Preliminary interrogation revealed that the meat was intended for delivery to shops in Shivajinagar. Police suspect the beef was sourced from unlicensed operations, raising concerns about its quality. —*Salar News*

# Fadnavis, deputies take oath as MLAs

## Opposition MVA boycotts oath-taking ceremony to protest against alleged EVM misuse

**MUMBAI, 7 DEC**

Two days after being sworn in as Maharashtra Chief Minister, Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday took oath as an MLA along with deputy CMs Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, while the Opposition MVA boycotted the ceremony alleging EVM misuse.

The Opposition members refused to take oath as members of the of the newly-constituted legislative assembly on the first day of the three-day special session of the House, as they raised question marks over the ruling Mahayuti alliance's massive mandate and the trustworthiness of the electronic voting machines (EVMs).

Fadnavis, Shinde and Pawar were administered the oath of office as MLAs by pro-tem assembly speaker Kalidas Kolambkar soon after the proceedings began at 11am.

Fadnavis, who represents the Nagpur South-West assembly constituency, took oath as a member of the state legislature's Lower House for the sixth time, having been first elected as an MLA in 1999.

Maharashtra DyCMs Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde with CM Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Talking to reporters, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray said, "MVA has decided not to take oath as members of the house on day one."The opposition is also protesting against the curfew and arrests made in Markadwadi village in Malshiras constituency of Solapur, where villagers have been demanding a mock poll using ballot papers, Thackeray said. Meanwhile, former Assembly speakers Dilip Walse-Patil, Rahul Narwekar, former deputy speaker Narhari Zhirwal, senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal, BJP leaders Vijaykumar Gavit, Girish Mahajan also took oath as MLAs. *—PTI*

### Ajit gets clean chit in ₹1,000cr benami case

**MUMBAI, 7 DEC**

The Income Tax Appellate Tribunal cleared over Rs 1,000 crore worth of properties seized from Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar in 2021, dismissing benami allegations. This includes the Jarandeshwar Sugar Mill case, with the tribunal citing lack of evidence and a Supreme Court ruling limiting retroactive application of the 2016 Benami Act amendments.

*—Agencies*

## Shinde's Shiv Sena insists on Home portfolio

**MUMBAI, 7 DEC**

Intense negotiations among the Mahayuti allies—comprising the BJP, Shiv Sena, and NCP—are under way regarding the allocation of ministerial portfolios. The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena is pushing for the Home Ministry amidst these discussions. Clarity on the new council of ministers is anticipated by Sunday, with an expansion of the Devendra Fadnavis-led cabinet set to occur on either 11 or 12 December.

Despite the Mahayuti's impressive victory in last month's Assembly elections, it took 12 days for the new chief minister to be sworn in, highlighting significant internal pressures. As Fadnavis assumes the role of Chief Minister and Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar take on Deputy CM responsibilities, focus is shifting to the complex cabinet formation.

- Cabinet can accommodate 43 ministers. A final decision on the number of ministers taking the oath will be reached within the next few days

Prominent leaders such as Uday Samant and Sanjay Shirsat have publicly advocated for the Home Ministry to be allocated to Shiv Sena, following Shinde's acceptance of his Deputy Chief Minister role beneath Fadnavis. The cabinet can accommodate a maximum of 43 ministers. A final decision on the number of ministers taking the oath will be reached within the next few days. *—PTI*

### Cong Chandrapur unit passes ballot paper resolution

**CHANDRAPUR, 7 DEC**

The Congress unit in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra on Saturday passed a resolution to contest the future elections on ballot papers and blamed EVMs for the defeat of the party candidates in the recent assembly polls. Chandrapur district Congress President and former MLA Subhash Dhote alleged that the police failed to crack the cases of bogus voter registrations. "We have passed a resolution to remove EVMs and hold the elections through ballot papers in future. This resolution will be forwarded to the Congress party," Dhote told reporters. He alleged that an amount of Rs 60 lakh seized by the police in the Rajura assembly segment has not been released yet because of BJP's pressure. Chandrapur MP Pratibha Dhanorkar and five Congress leaders lost the electoral contest against Mahayuti candidates. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

### Union Minister gets ₹50L ransom threat message

**RANCHI, 7 DEC**

Union Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth on Saturday said that he has received a ransom threat message and informed the Delhi Police and Jharkhand DGP in this regard. Seth said he received the threat message demanding a ransom of Rs 50 lakh from an unknown number on his mobile phone on Friday. The sender allegedly also gave a life threat to him. "I have already informed Delhi Police and Jharkhand DGP on Friday in this regard. Senior officials of Delhi Police including a DCP visited me and I have informed them,". Ranchi MLA CP Singh also demanded a probe into the matter from the state government. Jharkhand. Congress spokesperson Rakesh Sinha termed it a serious matter and urged the Union Home Ministry to look into it.*—PTI*

### Arms and ammunition seized in Manipur

**IMPHAL, 7 DEC**

A cache of arms and ammunition was seized by security forces in Manipur's Thoubal district, a police statement said on Saturday. The seizure was made during a search operation in the foothills of Pechi Chinglak on Friday. The arms and ammunition seized include an SMG carbine with magazine, three hand grenades, four cartridges, a bayonet and a radio set, among others. Meanwhile, five Imphal valley-based civil society organisations led by the All Manipur United Clubs Organisation will hold a mass rally on 10 December against the imposition of AFSPA in Manipur. *—PTI*

### TMC names Ritabrata as RS bypoll candidate

**KOLKATA, 7 DEC**

The Trinamool Congress on Saturday named party leader Ritabrata Banerjee as its candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha by-elections. The bypoll was necessitated following the resignation of Jawhar Sircar as the TMC's Rajya Sabha MP in September following the RG Kar rape-murder incident and subsequent protests. "... We are pleased to announce the candidature of Ritabrata Banerjee for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha by-elections," the party said in post on X. By-elections will be held on December 20 in the sole vacant Rajya Sabha seat from West Bengal, apart from seats in three other states. Ritabrata Banerjee was with the CPI(M) till 2017 and was its Rajya Sabha MP, before joining the TMC. *—PTI*

TMC Supremo Mamata Banerjee said that any decision regarding her successor would be made collectively by the party leadership **PHOTO: ANI**

## SP backs Didi as INDIA Chief, Congress opposes

**KOLKATA, 7 DEC**

Amid the disagreements on issues among the partners, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has expressed dissatisfaction with the functioning of the INDIA bloc while signalling her intent to take charge of the alliance if given the opportunity.

The TMC supremo said that she can manage the dual responsibility of running the Opposition front while continuing on her role as the chief minister of West Bengal.

Samajwadi Party spokesperson Udaiveer Singh said that if Banerjee has expressed any desire, the leaders of the INDIA alliance bloc should consider it and give her support it. However, the Congress has opposed Banerjee's leadership bid.

"Banerjee thinks so, but we don't," said Congress MP Varsha Gaikwad.

The Opposition alliance was formed in June 2023 with the motto of "BJP hatao, desh bachao" ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. But one of its founders, Janata Dal (United) chief Nitish Kumar, has since switched sides and joined hands with the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the BJP.

Meanwhile, amid the ongoing internal struggle within TMC between veteran leaders and the Young Turks, Banerjee said any decision regarding her successor would be made collectively by the party leadership rather than by her personally.

Banerjee dismissed notions of individual dominance, asserting, "I am not the party; we are the party. It is a collective family, and decisions will be made collectively."

On the debate about old versus new in the party, Banerjee maintained a balanced approach, stating, "Everyone is important. Today's newcomer will be tomorrow's veteran. While TMC has not officially declared any succession plans, Banerjee's remark comes amidst an ongoing tussle between the old guards, considered loyal to Mamata Banerjee, and the next-generation leaders, considered close to Abhishek Banerjee. *—PTI*

**'SITUATION CONCERNING'**

## Assam's Barak valley hotels ban Bangladesh nationals

**GUWAHATI, 7 DEC**

Hotels in Assam's Barak Valley have declared they will no longer accommodate nationals from Bangladesh until the reported violence against Hindus and other minorities in the neighbouring country ceases. The region, comprising Cachar, Sribhumi (formerly Karimganj), and Hailakandi, shares a 129kms border with Bangladesh's Sylhet region.

Babul Rai, President of the Barak Valley Hotel and Restaurant Association, stated, "The situation of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh is concerning. We cannot accept this in any way. Therefore, we have decided to stop hosting any nationals from that country until the situation improves."

He emphasised that stability must return to Bangladesh for their decision to be reconsidered.India saw a nationwide protests over alleged atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh. This announcement follows recent protests led by the Bajrang Dal, which included calls to close stalls selling Bangladeshi products at a global expo in Silchar and demands for the removal of the Bangladesh name from the visa centre's signboard. Nationwide protests erupt against atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh and arrest of Hindu monk Chinmaya Krishna Das.

Nationwide protests erupt against atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh and arrest of Hindu monk Chinmaya Krishna Das **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, BSP Chief Mayawati said on Saturday said that the Congress party is "silent" over the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh, most of whom are Dalits and from weaker sections, and is raising a hue and cry over Sambhal to woo Muslim voters.

She alleged the Dalits are suffering in the neighbouring country due to the Congress' "mistake" at the time of Partition and urged the Centre to take steps to bring them back to India. *—PTI*

### Odisha Assembly adjourned twice over job scam row

**BHUBANESWAR, 7 DEC**

The Odisha Assembly was adjourned twice on Saturday due to a ruckus by opposition BJD members who demanded a clarification from Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi over his allegation of irregularities in government recruitment during the previous BJD regime.

Chief Minister Majhi accused the Odisha government of recruitment irregularities during the previous BJD regime, including job sales for lakhs of rupees. He introduced the Odisha Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024, but the BJD strongly condemned the statement and demanded proof. During Question Hour, the House only functioned for three minutes due to agitation. When the house reassembled at 11.30am Opposition chief whip Pramila Mallik condemned Majhi's statement, stating it was insulting to meritorious students recently recruited for the ASO post.

BJD Assembly has been embroiled in controversy following the Chief Minister's statement on the recruitment process. BJP member Santosh Khatua accused him of demotivating candidates and demanded clarification. *—PTI*

## Himanta expands Cabinet, 4 Ministers sworn in

**GUWAHATI, 7 DEC**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday expanded his cabinet with four BJP MLAs sworn in as ministers.

Assam Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office to the four new ministers - Prasanta Phookan, Kaushik Rai, Krishnendu Paul, and Rupesh Goala at the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra here.

He and members of his cabinet were present on the occasion.

''Congratulations to all my colleagues who have taken oath today. Looking forward to working with them to fulfil Adarniya Shri @narendramodi ji's vision of a Viksit Assam'', he said on X.

Phukan is a four-time MLA from Dibrugarh, Paul a two-time MLA from Patharkandi while Rai and Goala are first-time MLAs from Lakhipur and Doom Dooma respectively. Phukan and Goala represent the Upper Assam tea districts of Dibruagah and Tinsukia respectively while Paul and Rai are from the two Barak Valley districts of Sribhumi and Cachar.

Himanta Sarma **PHOTO: PTI**

Tea Welfare and Labour minister Sanjay Kishan, who represents the Tinsukia constituency, resigned from office on Thursday, to pave the way for Goala with both representing the tea tribe community. Kishan has since been appointed as the Chairman of the Assam Food and Civil Supplies department.

Parimal Suklabaidya had resigned from the Himanta Biswa Sarma cabinet after he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Silchar (SC) constituency earlier this year. *—PTI*

**'PAY TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS'**

## *Pitroda's phone hacked, ransom demanded in cryptocurrencies*

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Congress leader Sam Pitroda's smartphone, laptop and server have been repeatedly hacked over the past few weeks with hackers issuing threats and demanding tens of thousands of dollars in cryptocurrency, according to a mail sent to those on his mailing list.

"They have warned that, if unpaid, they will launch a smear and misinformation campaign to tarnish my reputation by contacting people in my network," Pitroda said in the email.

"I want to bring to your attention a critical matter: my laptop, smartphone, and server have been repeatedly hacked and severely compromised over the past few weeks," it read.

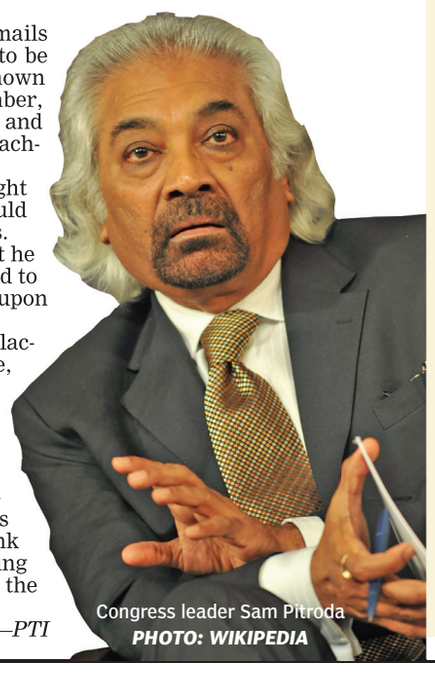
In the email addressed to family and friends, the Indian Overseas Congress chief urged them "not to open" any emails or messages that appear to be about him from any unknown mail ID or mobile number, not to click on any links and not to download any attachments.

He added that these might contain malware that could compromise their devices.

Pitroda further said that he was travelling but planned to take immediate action upon his return to Chicago.

"This will include replacing outdated hardware, upgrading software and implementing robust new security measures to safeguard my digital presence. I sincerely apologise for any inconvenience or concern this situation may cause. Thank you for your understanding and vigilance," he said in the email.

*—PTI*



Congress leader Sam Pitroda **PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA**

## Delhi BJP opens poll office, unveils 'will bring change' slogan

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

The election office of BJP for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls was inaugurated at the Pant Marg headquarters of the party's state unit on Saturday in the presence of its senior leaders.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva performed a 'havan' along with his wife with the party's state election in-charge Baijayant Panda, election coordination committee chairman and Union Minister Harsh Malhotra, MPs, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Manoj Tiwari, Kamaljeet Sehrawat, Bansuri Swaraj, Yogendra Chandolia, Praveen Khandelwal and others in attendance.

Elections for the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due to be held in February next year. The BJP, out of power in Delhi since 1998, is making all-out efforts to end the dominance of the Aam Aadmi Party led by Arvind Kejriwal. The slogan 'Ab Nahi Sahenge, Badal Kar Rahenge' (will not tolerate now, will bring change) as a theme for the feedback exercise for the manifesto, was given by Panda on the occasion. BJP leaders, speaking on the occasion, said the people of Delhi have had enough and now they want to remove AAP from power to get relief from dirty water supply, damaged roads, expensive electricity and high levels of pollution.

BJP's newly unveiled slogan 'Ab Nahi Sahenge, Badal Ke Rahenge' painted on the Delhi BJP office, in New Delhi, on Saturday, **PHOTO: PTI**

*—PTI*

## ED attaches ₹388 cr in Mahadev app betting case

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

A The Enforcement Directorate (ED) announced on Saturday that it has seized assets valued at approximately Rs 388 crore in its ongoing investigation into the Mahadev online betting scandal, involving several prominent politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh. The assets seized include investments from the Mauritius-based Tano Investment Opportunities Fund linked to Dubai-based hawala operator Hari Shankar Tibrewal, and properties across Chhattisgarh, Mumbai, and Madhya Pradesh owned by promoters of betting applications. A provisional order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act was issued on 5 December, bringing the value of assets frozen to Rs 2,295.61 crore. *—PTI*

## Couple duped of ₹80 lakh in bank franchise scam

**THANE, 7 DEC**

Police in Maharashtra's Thane district have registered a case against three individuals accused of defrauding a couple of Rs 80 lakh by promising to secure authorisation for payments bank franchisees. The alleged scam took place between August 2022 and April 2023, with a formal FIR filed on Thursday. The suspects have been identified as Kalpit Ashokbhai Soni (46) and Kunjalsingh Vikramsing Solanki (33), both from Gujarat, and Surendrakumar Kishorelal Sharma (40) from Rajasthan. They reportedly assured a 46-year-old businesswoman and her husband lucrative franchise opportunities across Maharashtra, Goa, and Gujarat, including gold loan franchises and cash management schemes. However, despite transferring funds in instalments to the suspects' bank accounts, the couple received neither their money back nor the promised authorisation.*—PTI*

## Dubai groom duped, bride goes 'missing' in Punjab

**CHANDIGARH, 7 DEC**

A Dubai-returned groom, Deepak Kumar, 24, and his entourage of 150 guests were left stunned when they arrived in Moga, Punjab, only to discover his bride, Manpreet Kaur, was missing and the wedding venue did not exist. Deepak, who had been in contact with Kaur for three years via Instagram but had never met her, lodged a complaint with the police. After travelling from Jalandhar, his party was told that someone would escort them to 'Rose Garden Palace', but after waiting until 5pm with no sign of anyone, they learned the venue was fictitious. Deepak, who had previously sent Kaur Rs 50,000, stated that the marriage was arranged over phone calls with her parents. The police are currently investigating the incident as Deepak's attempts to contact the bride have been unsuccessful, with her phone reportedly turned off. *—PTI*

## 'Aggrieved' man tries to set fire to sub-registrar in TN

**KANYAKUMARI, 7 DEC**

A 54-year-old man has been arrested after he allegedly attempted to set fire to a sub-registrar at the official's office. The incident occurred when the man, reportedly frustrated by delays in the completion of some document corrections, poured petrol over the sub-registrar and sprinkled the flammable liquid on papers on the desk. Despite throwing a lit match at the official, the flames did not ignite. Police confirmed that a case has been filed against the man under relevant legal provisions, and an investigation is currently underway. Authorities are looking into the circumstances surrounding the incident and the alleged delays in the official's work *—PTI*

# SC bench to hear against Places of Worship Act

### A three-judge bench head by CJI will hear pleas on 12 Dec

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

PHOTO: PTI

Supreme Court constituted a special bench to hear a batch of PILs challenging the validity of certain provisions of a 1991 law that prohibits filing a lawsuit to reclaim a place of worship or seek a change in its character from what prevailed on 15 August, 1947.

A three-judge bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and KV Viswanathan is to hear the matter on 12 December at 3.30pm.

The court is seized of the pleas, including one filed by Ashwini Upadhyay who has prayed that sections 2, 3 and 4 of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 be set aside.

The matter will be heard in the backdrop of several suits filed in various courts, including related to Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi, Shahi Idgah Mosque in Mathura and Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, claiming that these were built after destroying ancient temples and seeking permission to offer Hindu prayers there. The Muslim side in most of these cases have cited the 1991 law to argue that such suits are not maintainable. As many as six petitions, including those filed by former Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy, have been filed against the provisions of the 1991 law. While Swamy wanted the apex court to "read down" certain provisions to enable Hindus to stake claim over the Gyanvapi Mosque and Shahi Idgah Mosque, Upadhyay claimed the entire statute was unconstitutional and no question of reading down arises.

On the other hand, Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind had cited the five-judge Constitution bench judgement in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title case, noting the reference to the Places of Worship Act, 1991, to argue that the law cannot be set aside now. The petition alleged that the 1991 law creates an "arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date" of 15 August, 1947, for maintaining the character of the places of worship or pilgrimage against encroachment done by "fundamentalist-barbaric invaders and law-breakers". *—PTI*

## TENSIONS FLARE UP AT VARANASI COLLEGE OVER MOSQUE ROW

**VARANASI, 7 DEC**

PHOTO: PTI

Tensions flared at Uday Pratap College as a large group of students protested, demanding the removal of a mosque from the campus. On Friday, hundreds gathered at the college gates, chanting "Jai Shri Ram" and waving saffron flags before attempting to enter the premises, only to be halted by police. Student leader Vivekanand Singh asserted that if the land on which the mosque stands does not belong to the Waqf Board, the structure should be removed. He threatened that if prayers continued at the mosque, students would respond by reciting the Hanuman Chalisa on-site.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Vidush Saxena confirmed that tensions escalated but were managed by police intervention. He stated that some individuals involved in the unrest had been identified and would face action. In an effort to address the situation, the college's student body established a 'student court' and issued an 11-point letter to the Uttar Pradesh Waqf Board, demanding clarification on the mosque's ownership within 15 days. Mohammad Yaseen from the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee emphasised that a prior Waqf Board notice claiming the mosque as Waqf property was cancelled in 2021, suggesting no justification for the ongoing dispute. The incident follows earlier unrest over perceived unauthorised prayers at the mosque, prompting police to restrict entry to the college campus. *—PTI*

Of the 38 air quality monitoring stations in the city, two reported air quality in the 'very poor' category on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

# Delhi's air quality slips back to 'poor' with AQI at 233

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

After a brief respite of three days, Delhi's air quality dropped again to the 'poor' category on Saturday.

The 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) of the city was recorded at 233 at 4 pm on Saturday, marking a deterioration from Friday's reading of 197, which fell in the 'moderate' category.

The primary pollutants on Saturday were PM2.5 and PM10, with PM2.5 levels recorded at 93.2 µg/m³ and PM10 levels at 185.4 µg/m³ at 2 pm. These fine particles pose significant health risks as they can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream.

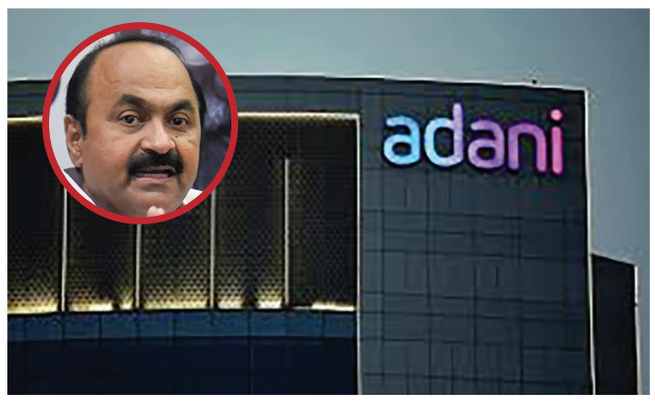
Of the 38 air quality monitoring stations in the city, two reported air quality in the 'very poor' category on Saturday, 30 were in the 'poor' category, and the rest recorded 'moderate' air quality, according to the Sameer app.

According to the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi, air quality in the city will likely remain in the 'poor' category on Sunday and Monday, while it is expected to deteriorate to 'very poor' on Tuesday.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) classifies AQI between 0 and 50 as 'good', between 51 and 100 as 'satisfactory', between 101 and 200 as 'moderate', between 201 and 300 as 'poor', between 301 and 400 as 'very poor', and above 400 as 'severe'. *—PTI*

# 'Kerala hiked tariffs to aid Adani'

**T'PURAM, 7 DEC**




Leader of the Opposition VD Satheesan accused LDF of terminating a long-term power purchase agreements PHOTO: PTI

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) has condemned the Kerala government's recent decision to increase electricity tariffs, claiming that it has resulted in significant losses for the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) and serves the interests of the Adani conglomerate.

Leader of the Opposition VD Satheesan and senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala accused the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government of terminating a long-term power purchase agreement initiated during the UDF's tenure in 2016, which had secured rates below Rs 5 per unit. They argue this move was designed to allow Adani into the state's power system.

According to the Congress leaders, this termination forced KSEB to procure power at rates between Rs 10 and Rs 14 per unit, pushing the utility's debt from about Rs 1,000 crore to over Rs 40,000 crore. Chennithala further noted that the KSEB is incurring daily losses of Rs 12 crore due to this situation.

In response to the latest tariff hike, which is the fifth increase since the LDF came to power in 2016, the UDF has announced state-wide protests. Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee Chief K Sudhakaran labelled the tariff increase as "extremely unfair and condemnable," urging the government to retract the decision. *—PTI*

**NO THREATS RECEIVED**

# Delhi bizman, out on morning walk, shot dead by 2 bike-borne men

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

The incident was reported to police at 8.36am PHOTO: PTI

A businessman was shot dead by two unidentified assailants while out for his morning walk in Shahdara, east Delhi, on Saturday.

The victim, Sunil Jain, 52, a resident of Krishna Nagar who operated a utensil business, was shot multiple times and was later rushed to a nearby hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries.

According to police, Jain was returning home on his scooter after a morning walk at Yamuna Sports Complex when the attackers, who were on a motorcycle, opened fire in the Farsh Bazar area before fleeing the scene. The incident was reported to police at 8.36am.

Deputy Commissioner of Police for Shahdara, Prashant Gautam, confirmed that Jain had no known enemies and had not received any threats. "We are investigating the case from all angles," he stated. Authorities are currently examining CCTV footage from the area to help identify the suspects. *—PTI*

# BPSC exam row: Police bins claims of Khan Sir's arrest

**PATNA, 7 DEC**

PHOTO: PTI

Bihar Police on Saturday dismissed social media rumours about the arrest of Patna-based tutor and YouTuber Khan Sir, stating he had come to a police station on his own accord to express solidarity with protesters detained over an illegal demonstration near the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) office.

Anu Kumari, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO), warned of initiating action against the social media handle 'Khan Global Studies' for spreading misinformation.

Khan Sir openly supported the agitating BPSC aspirants following the lathicharge in Patna on Friday, who were demanding withdrawal of "changes" to the rules for the 70th BPSC Preliminary Examination scheduled for 13 December.

Eyewitnesses claimed that two-three aspirants were injured in the lathicharge, a charge denied by the officials.

The protesters were demanding that the BPSC preliminary examination be conducted in the 'one shift, one paper' format, rather than using the 'normalisation of marks' process.

Normalisation equalises scores from examinations held in multiple shifts using a statistical formula.

BPSC said that no changes will be made in the examination process and the old system will be used.

Khan Sir on Friday demanded that a statement be issued by none other than the BPSC chairman ruling out the use of the 'normalisation process' for the examination, and extend the examination date as many aspirants faced technical issues while applying.. *—PTI*

## CISF sets up 'quality control' unit for civil aviation security

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

CISF has set up a quality control unit to "enhance" the "operational efficiency" of its aviation security wing that provides a counter-terrorist cover to 68 civil airports of the country.

An spokesperson for the paramilitary force said on Saturday that the Internal Quality Control Unit (IQCU) will play a "crucial" role in establishing "world-class" security procedures and technology for the airports that are used by lakhs of domestic and international passengers every day.

The initiative is in compliance with the National Civil Aviation Security Quality Control Programme (NCASQCP) of 2024 issued by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). *—PTI*

# Driver shot in stomach drives to save passengers

**ARA, 7 DEC**

PHOTO: REPRESENTATIVE

Santosh Singh, a jeep driver ensured the safety of his passengers by driving the vehicle for a few kilometres even after sustaining a bullet injury in the stomach in Bihar's Bhojpur district, police said on Saturday.

Singh was returning from a 'Tilak' ceremony with 14-15 people aboard his jeep when two bike-borne miscreants chased the vehicle near Jhaun village and opened fire with a bullet hitting Singh's stomach. Despite his injury and unbearable pain, he did not stop the vehicle and kept on driving for a few kilometres ensuring the safety of passengers. Singh finally stopped the vehicle at a safe place, the police said.

Police immediately reached the spot and took Singh to the nearest hospital. The incident happened on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday.

"He is out of danger…but he will remain under observation of doctors for some more days", Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO), Jagdishpur, Rajiv Chandra Singh told PTI on Saturday. *—PTI*

**ON INDIA'S RESOLUTION**

# *UN declares 21 Dec as World Meditation Day*

**UNITED NATIONS, 7 DEC**

India co-sponsored a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly to proclaim 21 December as World Meditation Day PHOTO: X

India co-sponsored a UN General Assembly draft resolution that was unanimously adopted to proclaim 21 December as World Meditation Day.

India, including Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mexico and Andorra, was a member of the core group of countries that guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution titled 'World Meditation Day' in the 193-member UN General Assembly on Friday.

"A day for comprehensive well-being and inner transformation! Glad that India along with other nations of the core group guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution on the declaration of 21 December as World Meditation Day @UN General Assembly today (Friday)," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said in a post on X.

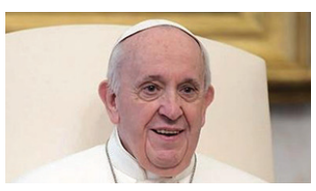
He said India's leadership in overall human wellbeing stems from "our civilisational dictum of #VasudhaivaKutumbakam - the whole world is one family".

A press release by the Permanent Mission of India to the UN said India's instrumental role in the adoption of the resolution on World Meditation Day was a "testimony to its firm commitment to overall human wellness and global leadership on this front in tune with our civilisational dictum of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam". It underlined that meditation is rooted in ancient practises and is an effective tool to achieve inner transformation and peace in the modern day.

The resolution, introduced by Liechtenstein, was also cosponsored by Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Burundi, the Dominican Republic, Iceland, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Portugal and Slovenia *—PTI*

# Pope Francis' visit to India likely after 2025

**T'PURAM, 7 DEC**



Union Minister George Kurian on Saturday said the much-awaited visit of Pope Francis to India is likely to happen after 2025, which has been announced as the "Jubilee Year" by the Catholic Church.

He noted that India had already invited the Pope officially and Prime Minister Narendra Modi directly extended him the invitation.

The rest of the matters and procedures were to be decided by the Vatican, he told Asianet channel.

Union Minister of State for Minority Affairs, Kurian was part of the delegation which reached Vatican to take part in the ordination of Archbishop George Jacob Koovakad as Cardinal by Pope Francis at a function to be held on Saturday.

Koovakad,51,from Kerala, has been organising Pope Francis' international tours since 2020 and will be among the 21 clergies elevated to the rank of Cardinal.

Previously, Koovakad, who held the title of Monsignor, was declared the Titular Archbishop of Nisibis in Turkey. *—PTI*

**WINTER IS HERE**

People stand around a bonfire to warm themselves during a cold winter morning, near India-Pakistan border, on the outskirts of Jammu, on Saturday
***PHOTO: PTI***

# Protecting sacred groves can boost climate efforts

Many groves are dying across India due to deforestation, mining and developmental activities.

Sacred groves bear different names based on their location. They are called sarnas in Jharkhand, devgudis in Chhattisgarh and orans in Rajasthan. Groves range in size, varying from places with a few trees to huge ones spread over several acres. There are groves where a single sal tree, considered sacred in Jharkhand, still stands intact.

The total area occupied by sacred groves is an estimated 33,000 hectares. This is 0.01 per cent of India's total area. Maharashtra has the highest number of groves, with nearly 3,000 documented.

Rich biodiverse areas, sacred groves are considered socially and culturally important. Through centuries, tribal communities have nurtured deep connections with groves where they offer worship. This continues even today.

In order to meet India's climate commitment of net zero by 2070, forest conservation is important. But besides government-owned forests, there is a need to protect sacred groves as these can help mitigate climate change by acting as carbon sinks. If properly managed, climate change can be halted, and people's close link with nature nurtured. There is often a sense of alienation when communities are relocated to boost conservation.

Yon Fernandez-de-Larrinoa, who heads the Indigenous Peoples Unit of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, said before the concept of ecology was developed, sacred groves signified environmental preservation and conservation. "Indigenous Peoples around the world have codes which guide their behaviour based on spirituality. It is codified in their customary rules and governance systems."

Varun Jain, the deputy director of Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve in Chhattisgarh, said how tribals worship flora and fauna as they are considered divine.

According to experts, in order to meet India's climate commitment of net zero by 2070, forest conservation is important
***PHOTO: LINKEDIN***

Jain feels that this deep reverence towards nature is a starting point to talk about forest conservation. The department has hired painters to carry out wall paintings in the villages inside the reserve to spread environmental awareness. Department staff have cleared 190 hectares of encroachment near a devgudi where rampant illegal felling had been taking place for the past 15 years.

"While providing community forest resource rights as part of the Forest Rights Act (passed in 2006), the department is trying to convince communities that a certain patch of forest be demarcated as sacred. This should not be used for grazing and firewood collection. It will ensure an inviolate space for wildlife," Jain said.

According to tiger expert Ullas Karanth, sacred groves may harbour smaller forms of biodiversity even though larger landscape species like tigers are sustained mainly on extensive government-owned forests.

The Waghoba Habitat Foundation in Mumbai, has managed to conserve a sacred grove 80 kilometres away from the metropolis.

In western India, the worship of Waghoba, a spirit deity which encompasses all big cats, is prevalent among tribal communities like the Thakars, the Koknas and the Warlis in forest patches. The ritual has helped preserve forest patches and supported coexistence. Citing the example of Aarey forest, where too Waghoba is worshipped, Valsan explained that communities have learnt to coexist with leopards. The animals have also learnt the same. This is unique, as Mumbai has the highest population density of leopards, and at the same time harbours the highest human density. The Sanjay Gandhi National Park, in which Aarey lies, has about 26 leopards per 100 sq km.

.Whatever be the reason, worshipping Waghoba shows the deep-rooted faith in ecology. But with the decline of many sacred groves, tribal cultures are also under threat. The custom of worshipping Waghoba and other deities may possibly vanish in future. As the country is trying to fulfil its climate goals, preservation of age-old customs related to forest conservation better continue. Jharkhand government came up with the concept of gherabandi around 2019 to conserve groves with boundary walls. In Chhattisgarh, the renovation of many groves was undertaken during the rule of the previous government. Abhay Minz, assistant professor of anthropology at Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee University in Ranchi, said such schemes are often carried out without including the voice of communities. Moreover, with the emphasis on reserved forests, sacred groves often escape notice. But as Minz pointed out, groves are places where felling of trees are forbidden, and hence, full of oxygen.

*—DowntoEarth*

**LETTERS** write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

# UnitedHealthcare CEO's murder fuels insurance row

For years, patients in the US health care system have grown frustrated with a bureaucracy they don't understand.

Doctors are included in an insurer's network one year but not the next. Getting someone on the phone to help can be next to impossible. Coverage of care and prescriptions is often unceremoniously denied.

This week's fatal shooting of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson has unleashed a wave of public feeling — exasperation, anger, resentment, helplessness — from Americans sharing personal stories of interactions with insurance companies, often seen as faceless corporate giants.

In particular, the words written on ammunition found at the shooting scene — "delay," "deny" and "depose," echoing a phrase used to describe how insurers dodge claim payouts — amplified voices that have long been critical of the industry.

"All of a sudden, I am fired up again," said Tim Anderson, describing how his wife, Mary, had to deal with UnitedHealthcare coverage denials before she died from Lou Gehrig's disease, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, in 2022.

Anderson said they couldn't get coverage for machines to help his wife breathe or talk — toward the end, she communicated by blinking when he showed her pictures. The family had to rely on donations from a local ALS group, he said.

"The business model for insurance is don't pay," said Anderson, 67, of Centerville, Ohio.

"When Mary could still talk, she said to me to keep fighting this," he added. "It needs to be exposed."

For Anderson and others, Thompson's death and the message left at the scene have created an opportunity to vent their frustrations. Conversations at dinner tables, office water coolers, social gatherings and on social media have pivoted to the topic, as police efforts to find the gunman keep the case in the news.

Hans Maristela said he understands why the chatter is bubbling up. The 54-year-old caregiver in California was moved to comment on Facebook about UnitedHealthcare's reputation of denying coverage. As a Catholic, he said, he grieves Thompson's death and feels for his family, especially with the holidays around the corner.

But he sees frustration with insurers even among his clients, most of them wealthy older people who've not been shielded from high out-of-pocket costs.

University of Pennsylvania researcher Michael Anne Kyle said she's not surprised by the growth of conversation around insurers.

"People are often struggling with this by themselves, and when you see someone else talk about it, that may prompt you to join the conversation," she said.

Kyle studies how patients access care and said she's seen frustration with the system build for years. Costs are rising, and insurers are using more controls such as prior authorizations and doctor networks to manage them. Patients are often stuck in the middle of disputes between doctors and insurers.

"Patients are already spending a lot of money on health care, and then they're still facing problems with the service," she said.

Insurers often note that most of the money they bring in goes back out the door to pay claims, and that they try to corral soaring costs and the overuse of some care.

In Ohio, Anderson said his initial reaction to the CEO shooting was to question whether it was connected to a coverage denial, like the ones he'd experienced with his wife.

"I definitely do not condone killing people," he said. "But I read it and said, 'I wonder if somebody had a spouse whose coverage was denied.'"

It's something Will Flanary, a Portland-based ophthalmologist and comedian with a large social media following, saw online a lot in the shooting's immediate aftermath and found very telling.

"It's zero sympathy," he said. "And the lesson to take away from that is not, Let's shame people for celebrating a murder.' No, it's: Look at the amount of anger that people have toward this system that's taken advantage of people and do something to try to fix that.'"

Flanary's content, published under the name Dr. Glaucomflecken, started out as niche eye doctor jokes and a way to cope with his own experiences with two cancer diagnoses and a sudden cardiac arrest. But it has evolved, featuring character skits that call attention to and satirize the decisions of large health insurers, including UnitedHealthcare.

He said he's never seen conversations around health insurance policy take off the way they did this week — and he hopes these new voices can help bring about change. *—PTI*

UnitedHealthcare CEO's death has unleashed a wave of public feeling — exasperation and anger from Americans sharing personal stories of interactions with insurance companies ***PHOTOS: FREEPIK***

# *Insurgency, isolation, and economic woes: Is Assad's rule at risk?*

The last time Syrian President Bashar Assad was in serious trouble was 10 years ago, at the height of the country's civil war, when his forces lost control over parts of the largest city, Aleppo, and his opponents were closing in on the capital, Damascus.

Back then, he was rescued by his chief international backer, Russia, and longtime regional ally Iran, which along with Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah militia helped Assad's forces retake Aleppo, tipping the war firmly in his favour.

Now, as insurgents pursue a shock offensive that quickly captured not just Aleppo, but the key city of Hama and a string of other towns across the country's northwest, the Syrian leader appears to be largely on his own.

Russia is preoccupied with its war in Ukraine, and Hezbollah, which at one point sent thousands of its fighters to shore up Assad's forces, has been weakened by a yearlong conflict with Israel. Iran, meanwhile, has seen its proxies across the region degraded by Israeli airstrikes.

Moreover, Syrian troops are exhausted and hollowed out by 13 years of war and economic crises, with little will left to fight.

So will Assad's rule collapse in the near future?

"The coming days and weeks will be critical in determining whether the rebel offensive poses an existential threat to the Assad regime or whether the regime manages to regain its footing and push back on recent rebel gains," said Mona Yacoubian, an analyst with the United States Institute for Peace.

"While weakened and distracted, Assad's allies are unlikely to simply cave to the rebels' offensive," she wrote in an analysis. Until recently, it seemed that Syria's president was almost out of the woods. He never really won the long-running civil war, and large parts of the country were still outside his control.

But after 13 years of conflict, it appeared that the worst was over, and that the world was ready to forget. Once viewed as a regional pariah, Assad saw Arab countries warming up to him again, renewing ties and reinstating Syria's membership in the Arab League. Earlier this year, Italy also decided to reopen its embassy in Damascus after a decade of strained relations.

In the aftermath of one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, aid groups and international donors in Syria began pivoting toward spending more on the country's recovery than on emergency assistance, providing a lifeline for Syrians and restoring basic services.

An image of Syrian President Bashar Assad, riddled with bullets, is seen on the facade of the provincial government office in the aftermath of the opposition's takeover of Hama, Syria ***PHOTO: PTI***

But then the sudden offensive launched by insurgents on Nov. 27 reignited the war and caught everyone off guard with its scope and speed.

It also left Syria's neighbours anxious, wary that violence and refugees could spill across borders and worried about the growing influence of Islamist groups, a major concern for most of Syria's Arab neighbours.

Analysts say a confluence of geopolitical developments beginning with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, followed by the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza that started on 7 October 2023, helped create the opportunity for Assad's opponents to pounce.

As the rebels advanced this past week, Syrian forces appeared to melt away, putting up no resistance, with several reports of defection. Russian forces carried out occasional airstrikes. Hezbollah's leader in Lebanon said the group will continue to support Syria, but made no mention of sending fighters again.

Aron Lund, a Syria expert with Century International, a New York-based think tank, said the developments in Syria are a geopolitical disaster for Russia and Iran.

The imposition of US sanctions, a banking crisis in neighbouring Lebanon contributed to the fact that almost all Syrians face extreme financial hardship.

That has caused state institutions and salaries to wither.

"If you can't pay your soldiers a living wage, then maybe you can't expect them to stay and fight when thousands of Islamists storm" their cities, Lund said. "It is just an exhausted, broken and dysfunctional regime" to start with. Part of the insurgents' attempt to reassert their grip on Aleppo, the city where they were ousted in 2016 after a grueling military campaign, was to issue a call to government soldiers and security agencies to defect, granting them what they called "protection cards," which offer some sort of amnesty and assurances that they won't be hunted down.

Hundreds of defectors lined up outside city police stations Thursday to register their details with the insurgents.

Hossam al-Bakr, 33, originally from Hama who served in Damascus and defected four years earlier to Aleppo, said he came to "settle his position" and get a new ID.

The laminated card handed out to each defector was titled the "defection card." It showed the name, ID number and place of service of each defector. It is issued by "The general command: Military Operations room."

Charles Lister, a longtime Syria expert, said while most of the international community has written off the conflict as either frozen or finished, the armed opposition has never given up and has been training for such a scenario for years.

A rag tag group of militias, plagued by infighting and rivalry, spent years preparing and organising, propelled by a dream to regain control of territory from Assad. "The regime has been more vulnerable over the last year or two than it has perhaps been throughout the entirety of the conflict," Lister said. "And it has gotten used to the idea that if it can wait things out, it will ultimately prove to be the victor." *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## Mahatma Gandhi bust unveiled in Nebraska

**NEWYORK/ SEATTLE, 7 DEC**

A bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled in the State Capitol building of Nebraska, marking a historic first for the Pacific Northwest jurisdiction of the Indian Consulate in Seattle. Governor Jim Pillen unveiled the statue at his office on 6 December, 2024, coinciding with a proclamation declaring the day as "A Day of Remembrance for Mahatma Gandhi" across Nebraska. The bust, a gift from the Government of India, signifies a vision of long-term partnerships with Nebraska and aims to promote cultural understanding and unity within the diverse communities of the state. This event follows the recent unveiling of a similar bust at the base of the Space Needle in Seattle. *—PTI*

# Syrian troops withdraw from south to defend Homs

## Syria faces isolation as allies are engaged in other conflicts

**AMMAN/BEIRUT, 7 DEC**

The Syrian army withdrew from much of southern Syria on Saturday, leaving more areas of the country, including two provincial capitals, under the control of opposition fighters, the military and an opposition war monitor said.

The redeployment away from the provinces of Daraa and Sweida came as Syria's military sent large numbers of reinforcements to defend the key central city of Homs, Syria's third largest, as insurgents approached its outskirts.

The rapid advances by insurgents is a stunning reversal of fortunes for Syria's President Bashar Assad, who appears to be largely on his own, with erstwhile allies preoccupied with other conflicts.

His chief international backer, Russia, is busy with its war in Ukraine, and Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah, which at one point sent thousands of fighters to shore up his forces, has been weakened by a year-long conflict with Israel.

Iran, meanwhile, has seen its proxies across the region degraded by Israeli regular airstrikes.

Syrian opposition fighters ride along the streets in the aftermath of the opposition's takeover of Hama, Syria *PHOTO: PTI*

The shock offensive began on 27 November led by the jihadi Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, or HTS, during which gunmen captured the northern city of Aleppo, Syria's largest, and the central city of Hama, the country's fourth largest city. The group has its origins in al-Qaida and is considered a terrorist organisation by the US and the United Nations. The Britain-based Observatory said Syrian troops have withdrawn from much of the two southern provinces and are sending reinforcements to Homs, where a battle is looming.

If the insurgents capture Homs, they would cut the link between Damascus, Assad's seat of power, and the coastal region where the president enjoys wide support.

The Syrian army said in a statement Saturday that it has carried out redeployment and repositioning in Sweida and Daraa after its checkpoints came under attack by "terrorists." The army said it is setting up a "strong and coherent defensive and security belt in the area," apparently to defend Damascus from the south. *—PTI*

**THE K-DRAMA**

Lawmakers queue to cast their votes on the impeachment motion against South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

# Prez Yoon survives impeachment bid

**SEOUL, 7 DEC**

A South Korean legislative push to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol over his short-lived imposition of martial law fell through on Saturday after most lawmakers from his conservative governing party boycotted the vote.

The defeat of the motion is expected to intensify public protests calling for Yoon's ouster and deepen political chaos in South Korea, with a survey suggesting a majority of South Koreans support the president's impeachment.

Yoon's martial law declaration drew criticism from his own ruling conservative party, but it is also determined to oppose Yoon's impeachment apparently because it fears losing the presidency to liberals.

Impeaching Yoon required support from two-thirds of the National Assembly, or 200 of its 300 members. The opposition parties who brought the impeachment motion had 192 seats, but only three lawmakers from PPP participated in the vote. The motion was scrapped without ballot counting because the number of votes didn't reach 200.

National Assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik called the result "very regrettable" and an embarrassing moment for the country's democracy that has been closely watched by the world. Opposition parties could submit a new impeachment motion after a new parliamentary session opens next Wednesday.

There are worries that Yoon won't be able to serve out his remaining 2 ½ years in office because his leadership took a huge hit. Many experts say some ruling party lawmakers could eventually join opposition parties' efforts to impeach Yoon if public demands for it grow further.

If Yoon is impeached, his powers will be suspended until the Constitutional Court decides whether to remove him from office. If he is removed, an election to replace him must take place within 60 days. Woo repeatedly urged ruling party members to return to the chamber to participate in the vote, waiting several hours for them to come. *—PTI*

## Storm Darragh: Hundreds without power in UK

**LONDON, 7 DEC**

Hundreds of thousands of people in Britain and Ireland were left without power and millions were warned to stay indoors Saturday as high winds and heavy rain battered the region. Gusts of up to 93 miles per hour were recorded as officials sent a rare emergency alert by phone to about 3 million households in Wales and southwest England early Saturday. The official alert, which came with a loud siren-like sound, warned people to stay indoors and was sent to every compatible mobile phone in the areas impacted by Storm Darragh. On Friday the UK's weather forecasters, the Met Office, issued a red weather warning — the most serious type. Major highways and bridges were closed because of strong winds*—PTI*

## Dominican Republic seizes 9.5 tons of cocaine

**SANTO DOMINGO ,7 DEC**

Authorities in the Dominican Republic announced on Friday that they confiscated nearly 9.5 tons of cocaine, the largest drug seizure in the country's history. The USD 250 million worth of drugs were found nestled inside a banana shipment that arrived at the Caucedo port in the capital of Santo Domingo, the country's most important seaport. The shipment had been sent from Guatemala and was destined for Belgium, said Carlos Devers, spokesman for the Dominican Republic's Anti-Drug Agency. Ten suspects have been detained; he said at a press conference. Authorities so far this year have seized nearly 47 tons of drugs.*—PTI*

## Burkina Faso military Junta dissolves govt

**BURKINA FASO, 7 DEC**

The military junta in Burkina Faso has dissolved the government, terminating Prime Minister Apollinaire Joachim Kyelem de Tambela's official functions, according to a decree from interim President Ibrahim Traore. No reasons were provided for the dismissal, but Tambela had been in office since October 2022, overseeing three successive administrations amidst political turbulence. The junta, which seized power in September 2022 by ousting Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba—a successor to the democratically-elected President Roch Marc Kabore—has faced significant challenges in addressing the nation's security issues. In May, the junta extended military rule for five years and has severed ties with Western and regional partners, including former colonial ruler France. *—DW News*

**WAR IS ON**

# Israeli airstrikes kill 29 in North Gaza

**JERUSALEM, 7 DEC**

Palestinian officials have reported that at least 29 individuals, including four medical personnel, lost their lives in Israeli airstrikes targeting the vicinity of the Kamal Adwan hospital in northern Gaza. Dr Hussam Abu Safia, the hospital's director, described the situation as "catastrophic."

In a related development, Lebanon announced the closure of all its land border crossings with Syria, save for the main crossing linking Beirut to Damascus. This decision was prompted by an Israeli airstrike that recently damaged a border crossing in northern Lebanon, just days after its reopening. Jordan has also shut a border crossing with Syria, citing mounting security concerns.

Meanwhile, Syrian insurgents have advanced into the central towns of Rastan and Talbiseh, moving closer to Homs, Syria's third-largest city. Just a day prior, jihadi-led opposition forces captured the central city of Hama, the fourth largest in Syria.

People cross border point between Lebanon and Syria *PHOTO: PTI*

The ongoing conflict has resulted in widespread destruction across Gaza, displacing approximately 90 per cent of the territory's 2.3 million residents, often multiple times. The hostilities erupted when Hamas militants launched an incursion into southern Israel in October 2023, resulting in the deaths of around 1,200 individuals. *—PTI*

# Denmark gives F-16 jets to Ukraine

**KYIV, 7 DEC**

Denmark has delivered a second batch of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday as he travelled to Paris to meet with top politicians and dignitaries.

In a message on Telegram, Zelenskyy praised Denmark and lamented a lack of dedication from other allies.

"The first batch of planes provided by the Danes are already shooting down Russian missiles: rescuing our people and our infrastructure. Now our air shield is reinforced even further," he said. "If all partners were so determined, we would have been able to make Russian terror impossible."

The announcement comes as Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region marks a day of mourning for 10 people killed in a Russian attack on Friday. A further 24 people, including two children, were injured when a missile struck a local service station, said regional Gov. Ivan Fedorov.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy lamented supported from allies *PHOTO: X*

Another three people were killed in a strike on the Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih Friday, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said.

Addressing the attacks, Zelenskyy said that Russian President Vladimir Putin did not seek "real peace."

Putin "only seeks the ability to treat any country this way, with bombs, missiles, and all other forms of violence," Zelenskyy said. *—PTI*

## Imran Khan accuses Pak government of 'authoritarianism'

Imran Khan *PHOTO: ANI*

**ISLAMABAD, 7 DEC**

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan accused the government of 'authoritarianism' as the number of cases and inquiries against him reached 188.

The former prime minister is booked in 99 cases in Punjab, 76 in Islamabad and two in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said the government books him in more cases after every protest by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). *—PTI*

# Indian student stabbed to death in Canada; housemate arrested

**ONTARIO, 7 DEC**

A 22-year-old Indian student, Gurasis Singh, was stabbed to death by his housemate in Ontario, Canada, police confirmed. The accused, 36-year-old Crossley Hunter, has been charged with second-degree murder.

Singh, a first-year business management student at Lambton College, was fatally stabbed on Sunday during an altercation at their shared residence on Queen Street in Sarnia. Police received an emergency call reporting the stabbing early on 1 December. During the argument, Hunter allegedly grabbed a knife in the kitchen and stabbed Singh multiple times. Police retrieved Singh's body and arrested Hunter at the scene.

Gurasis Singh;Crossley Hunter *PHOTO: X@STEPHENPUNWASI*

Sarnia Police Chief Derek Davis stated the investigation is ongoing to uncover the circumstances and motive behind the attack. "At this time, we do not believe it is racially motivated," Davis said. The police, in collaboration with Lambton College, extended support to Singh's family and friends as they navigate tragedy. *—Agencies*

# Trump in Paris to meet Macron

**PARIS, 7 DEC**

US president-elect Donald Trump is off on his first international trip,Mready to join world leaders and dignitaries in Paris for a Saturday celebration of the renovation of Notre Dame Cathedral after a devastating fire in 2019.

Trump wrote when he accepted the invitation earlier this week that French President Emmanuel Macron had done "a wonderful job ensuring that Notre Dame has been restored to its full level of glory, and even more so. It will be a very special day for all!"

Macron, who has had an up-and-down relationship with Trump, has made a point of cultivating a relationship with the president-elect since he defeated Vice President Kamala Harris last month.

- Macron, who has had an up-and-down relationship with Trump, has made a point of cultivating a relationship with the president-elect since his win

But his office nonetheless played down the significance of the invitation, saying that other politicians who do not currently hold office had been invited as well. Trump was invited to France by Macron, the president-elect of a "friendly nation," and President Biden will not attend due to scheduling conflicts. Macron and European leaders are trying to persuade Trump to support Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion.

Donald Trump *PHOTO: ANI*

Macron will meet with Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy before the Notre Dame event.

Andriy Yermak, Zelenskyy's aide, attempted to build trust with Trump's team during his first term. However, relations strained after Macron criticized Trump for questioning NATO and doubting America's defense pact.

Trump had mocked Macron during the campaign, threatened tariffs in 2019. *—PTI*

Pearl Harbor Navy veteran Bob Fernandez poses for a photograph with medals from his military service, in California *PHOTO: PTI*

**83RD ANNIVERSARY**

# *100-year-old Pearl Harbor survivor recalls 1941 attack*

**PEARL HARBOR, 7 DEC**

Bob Fernandez, a 100-year-old survivor of the Pearl Harbor attack, recalls the confusion and chaos he experienced during the Japanese bombing 83 years ago. Enlisting in the US Navy as a 17-year-old in August 1941, Fernandez hoped for adventure but found himself passing ammunition to artillery crews amidst explosions on the fateful morning of 7 December.

"We didn't even know we were in a war," Fernandez said, reflecting on the uncertainty that engulfed him as alarms sounded and Japanese planes flew overhead. He still vividly remembers seeing the red insignia on the enemy aircraft through a ship's porthole. Fernandez, who served on the USS Curtiss, was initially scheduled to attend the annual remembrance ceremony in Pearl Harbor on Saturday but had to cancel due to health issues. Two centenarian survivors are set to participate in the ceremony, honouring the over 2,300 servicemen who lost their lives that day, including 1,177 from the USS Arizona. Fernandez's ship suffered losses, with 21 men killed and 60 injured. "We lost a lot of good people... but we never know what's going to happen in a war," he said.

- Enlisting in the US Navy as a 17-year-old in 1941, Fernandez found himself passing ammunition to artillery crews amidst explosions on the fateful morning of 7 December

Following the war, he led a humble life as a forklift driver in California and still finds joy in music. His nephew, Joe Guthrie, fondly stated that "the ladies flock to him like moths to a flame" when he dances. As the remaining survivors age, only 16 are known to be living today, underscoring the importance of remembering their sacrifices. *—PTI*

## Ghana's general elections open amid economic crisis

**ACCRA, 7 DEC**

*PHOTO: X*

Polls opened on Saturday for a general election in Ghana, which is seen as a critical indicator of democratic resilience in a region beset by coups and extremist violence. Approximately 18.7 million citizens are registered to vote in both presidential and legislative elections, although the leading candidates offer limited promise for substantial change.

Once celebrated as a stalwart of democracy, Ghana is grappling with a severe economic crisis marked by soaring inflation and a dire job market. Recent surveys by Afrobarometer reveal that 82 per cent of Ghanaians believe their country is on the wrong track. While 12 candidates are vying for the presidency, the election has devolved into a two-horse race between Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and former President John Dramani Mahama of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). The NPP, which has struggled to tackle the economic challenges, faces off against an NDC that was ousted in 2016 after failing to fulfil economic commitments. Voters will also elect 276 members of parliament, with the current legislature evenly split between the NPP and NDC. *—PTI*

## Annapurna Finance secures $109.5M funding

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Micro and SME lender Annapurna Finance has raised USD 109.5 million (around Rs 927 crore) through a multilateral syndicated social loan facility under the external commercial borrowing framework, a statement said on Saturday. The funds have been raised from 10 known financial institutions from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, the Odisha-based SME lender said in the statement. The facility involves a green-shoe option to raise an additional USD 40 million (around Rs 338 crore), it added. The funds will be used for on-lending to microfinance borrowers with a focus on rural women and underserved populations, the company said. The initiative aims to expand access to financial services, enhance economic participation, and contribute to development in underbanked regions of India. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

## Tadiran to invest USD 10M to make IP phones in India

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Israel-based unified communications company Tadiran Telecom plans to invest at least USD 10 million (about Rs 80 crore) annually to manufacture IP telephones in India, a top company official has said. IP telephones support multiple communication functions, including conference calls through apps, and are generally used in business organisations. The company has partnered with DCM Shriram for manufacturing IP phones. Tadiran Telecom CEO Moshe Mitz, on the sidelines of an event to announce its manufacturing plan in India, said the company is likely to invest more every year in the second phase of production expansion, which will include Software development. Tadiran has been operating in India for the last 26 years through channel partners. —*PTI*

## Asian Bank approves $350 mn loan for logistics

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a USD 350 million policy-based loan to support India strengthen and modernize logistics sector.

As per a statement from the regional development bank, dated December 6, the loan will finance the second subprogram, supporting Indian government's efforts to create a comprehensive policy, planning, and institutional framework at the state and city levels. The development of India's logistics sector is pivotal in enhancing the competitiveness of its manufacturing sector. Through strategic policy reforms, infrastructural improvements, and digital integration, the government's ongoing reforms are set to transform the logistics landscape, ADB said. —*PTI*

# In meet with FM, ryots seek cheaper credit, lower taxes

### Farmers demanded doubling PM-KISAN pay in pre-budget meet

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Farmer representatives and agricultural stakeholders urged the government to provide cheaper long-term credit, implement lower taxes, and double the PM-KISAN income support during a comprehensive pre-budget consultation with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday.

The two-hour meeting saw a detailed discussion of proposals, aimed at addressing multiple challenges in the agricultural sector, with key demands focusing on financial relief, market reforms, and strategic investments.

Bharat Krishak Samaj Chairman Ajay Vir Jakhar emphasised the need for targeted interventions to boost agricultural productivity and farmer welfare.

Primary demands included reducing interest rates on agricultural loans to as low as 1 per cent and increasing the annual PM-KISAN instalment from Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000. Farmers' bodies also strongly advocated for zero-premium crop insurance for small farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during the second Pre-Budget Consultation with farmers ahead of the Budget 2025-26 ***PHOTO: PTI***

Taxation reforms were a critical component of the proposals, with stakeholders calling for GST exemptions on agricultural machinery, fertilisers, seeds, and medicines. PHD Chambers of Commerce and Industry requested a reduction of pesticide GST from 18 per cent to 5 per cent.

Jakhar proposed a targeted investment strategy of Rs 1,000 crore annually for "eight years, focusing on specific crops like chickpeas, soybean, and mustard to enhance national agricultural productivity.

This approach aims to strategically enhance crop yields, reduce import dependence, and improve national nutritional security, he told PTI after the meeting.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) Speaker Dharmendra Malik demanded a comprehensive review of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism, seeking calculations that include land rent, farm wages, and post-harvest expenses.

He also demanded the display of agricultural machinery prices on company websites, improvement in mandi infrastructure, widening MSP coverage beyond 23 commodities, disallowing imports below MSP levels and fixing minimum export prices only in emergencies. PHD Chambers of Commerce and Industry Chairman (Agribusiness committee) RG Agarwal called for a reduction in GST on pesticides from 18 per cent to five per cent, while highlighting the need to curb the sale of smuggled and fake pesticides while ensuring data protection for new molecular developments. —*PTI*

The average GDP growth for the first two quarters of FY25 stands at 6.05 per cent, indicating a cautious outlook ***PHOTO: ANI***

# SBI projects GDP to 6.3% for FY25

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

The State Bank of India (SBI) has projected India's GDP growth at 6.3 per cent for the fiscal year 2025, a downward revision from the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) estimate of 6.6 per cent . This assessment follows the RBI's recent decision to significantly downgrade its real GDP growth projection from 7.2 per cent to 6.6 per cent during its latest Monetary Policy Committee meeting, citing balanced risks to the economy.

The average GDP growth for the first two quarters of FY25 stands at 6.05 per cent, indicating a cautious outlook. This marks a notable shift, as it is the first time in five years that the RBI has raised its growth estimate, only to later downgrade it. The report underscores a trend of downward revisions in growth forecasts, reminiscent of FY22 and FY23, which saw average downgrades of 90 basis points. In conjunction with the growth forecast changes, the RBI announced a 50 basis point cut in the cash reserve ratio (CRR) in two phases, aiming to inject Rs 1.16 lakh crore into the banking system and ease liquidity constraints. —*ANI*

## CPI INFLATION LIKELY TO EASE TO 5.4% IN NOV: UBI

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation is projected to ease to 5.4 percent in November 2024, down from 6.2 per cent in October, according to a report from Union Bank of India. The anticipated decline is largely attributed to a seasonal decrease in vegetable prices, which had surged in prior months.

The report noted that vegetable prices, a significant driver behind the CPI increase in October, experienced a marked decline in November. After reaching a staggering 42 per cent year-on-year increase in October—the highest since January 2020—vegetable price inflation is estimated to have fallen to 27 per cent in November, primarily influenced by decreased tomato prices. Consequently, overall food inflation is expected to have relaxed to around 8 per cent, down from 9.7 per cent in October. —*ANI*

# Mahindra takes IndiGo to court over BE 6E rights dispute

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Mahindra & Mahindra has announced its intention to challenge IndiGo parent company InterGlobe Aviation's objections regarding the trademark rights of its new electric SUV, the BE 6e, in court. The automaker introduced its electric origin SUVs, including the BE 6e and XEV 9e, on 26 November 26.

Mahindra has filed for trademark registration under Class 12 (vehicles) for "BE 6e," emphasising that "BE" denotes its "born electric" platform. However, InterGlobe has raised concerns over the use of "6e," which closely resembles its own branding, specifically "6E."

In its defence, Mahindra stated that the mark "BE 6e" is distinctly different from IndiGo's "6E," which pertains to the airline industry, asserting that there is no potential for confusion. Mahindra further noted that they have previously faced similar objections from Tata Motors regarding the IndiGo name and view InterGlobe's current objection as inconsistent.

Mahindra plans to contest the objection vigorously in court while maintaining its focus on advancing electric transport in India ***PHOTO: X***

The company stressed its commitment to providing a quality customer experience and expressed disappointment over what they consider an unnecessary dispute between two major Indian multinationals. Mahindra has opted to refer to its product simply as "BE 6" while firmly disputing IndiGo's claims, warning that allowing such claims could impede industry innovation and branding freedom across various sectors.

Mahindra plans to contest the objection vigorously in court while maintaining its focus on advancing electric transport in India. —*ANI*

## IMF ED praises India's economic growth and infra

**WASHINGTON, 7 DEC**

Krishnamurthy V Subramanian, the Executive Director at the International Monetary Fund and former Chief Economic Advisor of India, has expressed strong optimism regarding India's economic trajectory. Speaking in an interview, he highlighted the global admiration for India's public digital infrastructure and inclusive growth initiatives.

Subramanian noted that, despite a slight dip in growth rates due to reduced capital expenditure and export challenges, India's economy has demonstrated resilience, maintaining an impressive post-Covid growth rate of around 7 per cent. He asserted that this temporary setback will likely stabilise soon. The IMF board members frequently commend India's innovative public digital initiatives and its progress in inclusive growth over the past decade. —*PTI*

## CRR cut expected to support Net Interest Margins of banks: Report

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a 50 basis points reduction in the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR), lowering it from 4.5 per cent to 4 per cent in two phases. According to a report from Axis Securities, this move is anticipated to offer marginal support to banks' Net Interest Margins (NIMs) while enhancing liquidity in the economy. The decision is expected to inject approximately Rs 1.16 lakh crore into the banking system, thereby easing liquidity pressures and aligning with the economy's productive needs. However, challenges persist, particularly for banks with a high proportion of floating-rate loans. —*PTI*

**DEAL TO BE FINALISED SOON**

# Paytm sells stake in PayPay for ₹2,364 cr

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

One97 Communications, the parent company of fintech brand Paym, has announced that its Singapore-based arm has approved the sale of its Stock Acquisition Rights in Japan's PayPay to SoftBank Vision Fund 2 for Rs 2,364 crore. The disclosure was made in a regulatory filing on Saturday.

In partnership with PayPay, a digital wallet firm, Paytm Singapore had previously signed an agreement with SoftBank Corp, SoftBank Group Corp, and Yahoo Japan Corporation to provide technology services. As part of this arrangement, Paytm Singapore acquired Stock Acquisition Rights that could be converted into 159,012 shares, representing a 7.2 per cent stake in PayPay on a fully diluted basis.

PHOTO: PTI

The Board of Directors of One97 Communications Singapore Private Limited approved the sale during a meeting on 6 December 2024. The transaction is valued at JPY 41.9 billion, which is approximately Rs 2,364 crore. This sale positions PayPay's valuation at around USD 3.8 billion, roughly Rs 32,000 crore.

Paytm has indicated that the transaction is expected to be finalised by December 2024, marking a significant move in its investment strategy within the digital payment landscape. —*PTI*

# UltraTech gets CCI notice over India Cements deal

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Leading cement maker UltraTech Cement has received a notice from the fair trade regulator CCI over its proposed acquisition of the South-based India Cements Ltd.

UltraTech Cement, in a regulatory filing, said it has received notice from the Competition Commission of India (CCI), and the Aditya Birla group flagship firm is confident in the merits of its case.

The southern market for grey cement, where India Cements primarily operates, is highly competitive and fragmented, with the presence of over 35 grey cement manufacturers.

Under the CCI Act, where the fair trade regulator is of the opinion that a combination is "likely to cause, or has caused an appreciable adverse effect on competition within the relevant market in India", it shall issue a notice to show cause to the parties to combination calling upon them to respond within 15 days.

Adani Cement recently announced to acquisition of CK Birla group firm Orient Cement ***PHOTO: X***

After the receipt of the response of the parties to the combination, CCI may also call for a report from its probe unit -- Director General of Investigations.

Earlier in July this year, UltraTech Cement had announced the acquisition of a 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements from promoters and their associates in a Rs 3,954 deal in a move to expand its footprint in the highly competitive and fast-growing southern cement market, particularly Tamil Nadu.

Besides, it had also announced a Rs 3,142.35 crore open offer to acquire 26 per cent share of ICL from its shareholders.

UltraTech leads the Indian cement market with a consolidated capacity of 156.66 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of grey cement.

It is followed by billionaire Gautam Adani-led Adani Group, which is rapidly pacing up its capacity through acquisitions and capacity expansions.

Adani Cement recently announced to acquisition of CK Birla group firm Orient Cement, through which it will achieve a capacity of 100 MT (million tones) per annum by the end of FY25 and a gain of 2 per cent in the overall market share in the country.

Both the cement makers are rapidly scaling up their capacity. Adani Group aspires to have 140 MTPA capacity by FY28, while UltraTech expects to have 200 MTPA by FY27. —*PTI*

**SAYS UBS REPORT**

# *'India to see rise in billionaire entrepreneurs'*

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

India is set to witness a significant increase in billionaire entrepreneurs over the next decade, replicating the trajectory of China up until 2020, according to a recent report by UBS.

Key factors fuelling this growth include rapid urbanisation, digitalisation, enhanced manufacturing capabilities, and strategic preparation for energy transition. The report suggests that "India's billionaire entrepreneurs may multiply over the next ten years just as China's did before 2020."

Recent data highlights a remarkable increase in the number of Indian billionaires, which has more than doubled—up 123 per cent—reaching a total of 185 by April 2024. During the same period, their combined wealth has surged by 263 per cent, now standing at an impressive USD 905.6 billion.

Recent data highlights a remarkable increase in the number of Indian billionaires ***PHOTO: X***

Additionally, family businesses have significantly contributed to this economic transformation, with India housing one of the highest numbers of publicly listed family-owned enterprises globally. The report identifies 108 such businesses in India, positioning the country third worldwide in this category. These businesses have played a crucial role in driving economic growth and wealth creation.

Over the past decade, the NSE Nifty 500 Index has more than doubled, increasing by 109 per cent in USD terms, coinciding with the prosperity of billionaire families whose ventures span a wide variety of sectors.

As India advances economically, the report anticipates an even greater influx of billionaire entrepreneurs in the years to come. —*ANI*

# Foreigners invest Rs 24,453 cr in Dec

**NEW DELHI, 7 DEC**

Foreign investors have reinvigorated their presence in Indian equity markets, recording a net purchase of over Rs 24,400 crore in the first week of December.

Data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) reveals that Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) invested Rs 24,453 crore in equities between 2 and 6 December.

The most significant single-day inflow occurred on Friday, 6 December, when FPIs acquired equities worth 9,489 crore, the highest investment for the week. This buying spree marks a stark reversal from the selling trend seen in October and November, during which foreign investors were net sellers.

"FIIs turning buyers in early December, reflecting a complete reversal of their sustained selling strategy over the last two months, has shifted market sentiments. In October, total FII selling through exchanges reached Rs 113,858 crore, while in November, it decreased to Rs 39,315 crore. Including purchases through the primary market, total FII buying by 6 December stands at Rs 24,453 crore (Source: NSDL). This indicates a clear change in FII strategy in India. It can be argued that the phase of relentless FII selling has concluded," commented VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. —*PTI*

The most significant single-day inflow occurred on Fridaywhen FPIs acquired equities worth Rs 9,489 crore ***PHOTO: X***

PHOTO: X

## PSG: David hits a double as Lille beats Brest

PARIS, 7 DEC

Paris Saint-Germain failed to score in Ligue 1 for the first time this season as the reigning champion was denied by outstanding goalkeeping from Auxerre's Donovan Léon in a 0-0 draw. Léon's string of superb saves thwarted PSG's attacking stars. After a fairly even first 45 minutes, PSG camped in the Auxerre half but could not find a way past León, who made memorable stops from Gonçalo Ramos, Achraf Hakimi, Kang-In Lee, Désiré Nonka-Maho and Randal Kolo Muani. Vitinha saw one curling shot come back off the bar. PSG had 25 shots to Auxerre's six and 15 corners to Auxerre's three but the home side still could have stolen all three points, as PSG keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma had to make a smart stop from Hamed Traorè. PSG remained eight points clear on top of Ligue 1. Auxerre was eighth.—*PTI*

## Bhullar slips to tied 68, and Niemann grabs lead

RIYADH, 7 DEC

Gaganjeet Bhullar, the lone Indian to cut, shot 73 in the third round and slipped to tied 68 in the USD 5 million PIF Saudi International Golf here. Anirban Lahiri and Shubhankar Sharma had missed the cut. Chile's Joaquin Niemann drained a 10-foot birdie putt on the 18th to finish one stroke ahead of Americans Peter Uihlein and Caleb Surratt after the third round of the tournament. Niemann has been disappointed with his failure to win over the past three weeks following some underwhelming final rounds but will have a chance to rectify that now after he fired a six-under-par 65 to lead the way on 17-under. —*PTI*

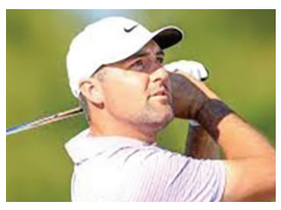


PHOTO: X

## Scheffler grabs a 2-shot lead at Hero World Challenge

ALBANY, 7 DEC

Defending champion Scottie Scheffler regained his swing and putting powers to card a marvelous 8-under 64 and grab the sole lead on the second day of the Hero World Challenge here. Scheffler, who had a middling 5-under 67 on the opening day, changed the script dramatically with seven birdies on the front nine that helped him close the day with a commanding 36-hole total of 131 (-13), the best on this course after becoming the host of this event in 2014. Rickie Fowler had posted a tournament record of 61 (-11) in the final round in 2017 while scoring a front-nine 28.—*PTI*

## Lewis qualifies 18th for his last race with Mercedes

ABU DHABI, 7 DEC

Seven-time Formula 1 champion Lewis Hamilton is set to start his last race with Mercedes from 18th on the grid after a bizarre incident wrecked his final qualifying lap Saturday.A plastic pole marking the inside of a corner was knocked loose by Kevin Haas and Hamilton drove over it, leaving the object jammed under his Mercedes. Hamilton was already among the slowest in the first part of qualifying and he was eliminated shortly after."I messed that up big time, guys," Hamilton told the team over the radio.Hamilton is moving to Ferrari for 2025 after 12 years with Mercedes, where he won six drivers' titles. —*PTI*

# Kohli, Rohit falter as India totter to 128/5

### Thanks to Head's 8th Test century, which he reached in 111 balls

India's captain Rohit Sharma walks off the field after losing his wicket during day two of the second cricket test match between Australia and India at the Adelaide Oval in Adelaide PHOTO: PTI

ADELAIDE, 7 DEC

Australia tightened their grip on the pink ball Test as their formidable pacers scythed through India's top-order after nemesis Travis Head's counterattacking century handed his team a substantial first-innings lead on a riveting second day here on Saturday.

Travis Head

The Adelaide Oval was throbbing with life through the three sessions of play as Head dominated India with his wide range of strokes on the way to 140 off 141 balls before the trio of Scott Boland (2/39), Mitchell Starc (1/49) and Pat Cummins (2/33) left the visitors in a spot of bother at 128 for five in their second innings and trailing by 29 runs.At stumps, Rishabh Pant was living dangerously on a 25-ball 28 and Nitish Reddy was batting on 15 off 14.

- Mohammed Shami, after recovering from ankle surgery and knee swelling, is poised to rejoin the Indian cricket team for the final two Tests against Australia.

Thanks to Head's eighth Test century, which he reached in 111 balls after toying with the Indian bowling attack, Australia ended with 337 all out, and more importantly, a 157-run first-innings lead. The hosts are looking to restore parity in the five-match series after the 295-run hammering in the opener at Perth.

Boland then had Virat Kohli (11) caught behind after he got one to land right in the channel which has been troubling the Indian batting mainstay for a while now. To make matters worse for the visitors, Starc knocked down Shubman Gill's (28) middle stump with his late in-swing doing the damage to leave India at 86 for four in front of a record crowd of over 50,000.

Pat Cummins

**Siraj's send-off to Head sparks tensions**

Mohammed Siraj's fiery send-off to centurion Travis Head added drama to the second day of the Pink-ball Test here on Saturday with the Australian batter expressing disappointment at the India pacer's conduct and the legendary Sunil Gavaskar calling his antics "totally uncalled for".

India 180 and 128 for 5 (Pant 28*, Cummins 2-33, Boland 2-39) trail Australia 337 (Head 140, Labuschagne 64, Bumrah 4-61, Siraj 4-98) by 29 runs. —*PTI*

THREE-MATCH ODI SERIES

# Focus on batting as India looks to avoid series defeat

BRISBANE, 7 DEC

A desperate India will need their under-fire batters to step up in the second Women's ODI against Australia on Sunday, as the visitors aim to avoid another series loss Down Under.

India's batting woes continued as the tourists were bundled out for 100 in the series opener, leading to a demoralizing five-wicket defeat, their heaviest balls remaining since ODIs were reduced to 50 overs a side. India has never won a series Down Under, and they will have their task cut out against a quality Australian side. The Australian side showed no signs of rust despite playing in the format after a nine-month gap.

On the other hand, it was the Indians who appeared under-prepared as the squad was unable to train together as some of the players were competing in domestic T20 tournaments while others played in the Women's Big Bash League. Additionally, one of their two practice sessions here was washed out due to rain.

After opting to bat, the Indian batters were unable to capitalise on good batting conditions. They lost wickets at regular intervals, were unable to stitch

PHOTO: PTI

partnerships, and were done in by Megan Schutt's brilliant spell with the new ball.

"We were expecting a good score if our batters had applied themselves better. If we had more runs on the scoreboard, anything could have happened." India coach Amol Muzumdar conceded after the match.

With the batting inconsistencies continuing from the New Zealand series, time is running out for India, who will host the ODI World Cup next year.

The Indian think tank will be keen to stabilize their batting and bowling line-up ahead of the marquee event.

Even though the bowlers had a small target to defend, they did well to pick five wickets. The only silver lining in an otherwise forgettable outing for India was pacer Renuka Thakur and young leg-spinner Priya Mishra. The match starts at 5.15 am IST. —*PTI*

ENGLAND VS NEW ZEALAND

# Milestones galore as England leads by 533 runs in the 2nd test

WELLINGTON, 7 DEC

England led New Zealand by 533 runs with five second-innings wickets in hand Saturday after another day of extraordinary incidents and milestones, including a hat-trick on the second day of the second test at the Basin Reserve.

At stumps, England was 378-5 in its second innings with Joe Root 73 not out and captain Ben Stokes unbeaten on 35.

Root was among the history-makers Saturday, reaching his 100th score of 50 or more in tests. When he reached his 65th half-century, which goes along with his 35 centuries, he became the fourth player after Sachin Tendulkar, Jacques Kallis, and Ricky Ponting to achieve that feat.

When Stokes declares, possibly overnight, New Zealand will have to achieve the highest successful fourth-innings run chase in test history to win the match and level the three-match series. England won the first test by eight wickets in Christchurch.

The record successful fourth innings total currently sits at 418, achieved by the West Indies against Australia at St. John's in the Caribbean 21 years ago.

Jacob Bethell made his second half-century in as many Tests PHOTO: X

**BRIEF SCORE**

England 280 and 378 for 5 (Root 73*, Stokes 35*) lead New Zealand 125 (Atkinson 4-31, Carse 4-46) by 533 runs —*PTI*

# U19 Asia Cup: Ruthless India to face Bangladesh

DUBAI, 7 DEC

It will be the clash between the defending champions and the country with the most titles as Bangladesh take on India at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday in the final of the ACC Men's U19 Asia Cup 2024.

India, after losing their first match against Pakistan, has been on a roll, beating all their opponents by large margins, including Friday's semi-final match against Sri Lanka, where they won easily by seven wickets with 28 overs to spare. On the other hand, Bangladesh has been equally impressive, losing only one match to Sri Lanka in the group stage and defeating Pakistan by seven wickets in the second semi-final of the day. For India, the opening pair of Ayush Mhatre and 13-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi have done the bulk of the scoring, with 175 and 167 runs, respectively, from the four matches they have played. For Bangladesh,

it has been their bowling attack that has proven lethal, with Md. Al Fahad currently leads the wicket-takers tally with 10 scalps, followed by Md. Iqbal Hasan Emon has the same number of wickets.

India and Bangladesh will go head-to-head in a repeat encounter of the 2023 semi-final. It will be a clash between India's exciting batting order and Bangladesh's robust bowling line-up, with Bangladesh having outdone India in the last edition of the tournament. The final between India U19 vs Bangladesh U19 will be live for the subcontinent audiences on Sony Sports Ten 3 SD & HD (Hindi) from 10:15 am onwards while the live streaming will be done exclusively on Sony LIV. —*PTI*

## Rajasthan played out a draw against B'luru in TPL

MUMBAI, 30 OCT

Punjab Patriots pipped Hyderabad Strikers, while Rajasthan Rangers and Bengaluru SG Pipers played out the first-ever tie of the season in the Tennis Premier League here on Saturday.

Despite their loss by a margin of 51-49, Hyderabad Strikers remained on the top spot of the points table in the sixth edition of the tournament with 260 points. Rajasthan Rangers are in the second spot with 255 points, followed by Punjab (249) and Bengaluru SG Pipers (248) in third and fourth places respectively, with a lot left to play in the competition. In the first match of the day, Hyderabad's Dart continued with her impressive run to beat Punjab's Elina Avanesyan 16-9 in women's singles.Punjab's Mukund led the fightback for his side as he got the better of Benjamin Lock, triumphing 18-7 in the men's singles category. —*PTI*

## KAVIN AND MOHSIN FINISH 17TH AND 20TH IN RACE 1 OF AP250 CLASS

BURIRAM, 7 DEC

IDEMITSU Honda Racing India riders Kavin Quintal and Mohsin Paramban put up a determined display in race 1 of Round 6 of the FIM Asia Road Racing Championship, finishing 17th and 20th respectively in the competitive Asia Production 250cc (AP250) class on Saturday.

The 19-year-old Kavin from Chennai started the 10-lap race from the 18th position on the grid and navigated the intense fight with determination, managing to maintain his position to cross the chequered flag with a total time of 19:19.129s.

Teammate Mohsin, starting from 23rd on the grid, also put up a brave fight to finish the race in 20th place with a total time of 19:55.959s.

Kavin and Mohsin PHOTO: X

The team couldn't earn any points in race 1 of Round 6, and their cumulative points currently stand at 13 points for the season in the Asia Production 250cc (AP250) class. "It was a challenging race from the outset. The Chang Circuit's demanding layout required intense focus. —*PTI*

# Gukesh plays out an easy draw, scores remain tied

SINGAPORE, 7 DEC

Indian challenger D Gukesh yet again proved equal to the task with defending champion Ding Liren of China as the 10th game of the World Chess Championship match between them ended in a draw without much excitement here on Saturday.

It was by far the easiest of the game with black pieces for Gukesh as the position played itself out of a London system game wherein Ding Liren took no risks and was also apparently happy with the drawn result. The seventh consecutive draw and eighth of the match left both players on an identical tally of 5 points each, still shy of 2.5 points to win the championship.The two players signed peace after 36 moves.Just four more classical games are left to be played in the USD 2.5 million prize money championship and if a tied result happens after 14 rounds, there will be games under faster time control to determine the winner.

D Gukesh yet again proved equal to the task with defending champion Ding Liren of China PHOTO: PTI

The 32-year-old Liren had won the opening game while the 18-year-old Gukesh had emerged victorious in the third game.Liren continued with his London system in the opening and came with a slight change early that left the pawn structure symmetrical. The tactic might have worked on another day but Gukesh for once decided not to press hard as black out of an equal position. Gukesh, the younger ever challenger, had his task cut out and he passed all the tests with flying colors. —*PTI*

SERIE A

# *Milan beat Parma to close in leaders Napoli*

LONDON, 7 DEC

Inter Milan moved a point behind Serie A leaders Napoli on Friday after seeing off Parma 3-1 at the San Siro ahead of a key Champions League clash at Bayer Leverkusen. Brilliantly taken goals either side of half-time from Italian internationals Federico Dimarco and Nicolo Barella and Marcus Thuram's neat volley in the 67th minute were enough for the reigning champions to close in on Napoli. Simone Inzaghi's Inter are also level on 31 points with second-placed Atalanta, who could claim the provisional league lead with a win over AC Milan later on Friday.

Napoli host Lazio on Sunday night after being dumped out of the Italian Cup by their capital city opponents on Thursday.

"We scored some great goals today... The only disappointing thing is that we conceded. We didn't deserve to given how we played over the 94 minutes," said Inzaghi to DAZN.

Inter is unbeaten in 14 matches in all competitions and travels to Leverkusen on Tuesday knowing that a win would almost certainly ensure direct qualification to the last 16 with two matches remaining.

Parma, who netted through a late Matteo Darmian own goal, sit 12th in Serie A, but Inzaghi still picked his best available XI even with a big European fixture around the corner, selecting captain and star striker Lautaro Martinez for his 300th Inter appearance.

Martinez has struggled for form this season and as well as having a first-half strike rightly ruled out for offside the Argentina forward also wasted three good opportunities to score.

The 27-year-old had his head in his hands when he poked wide a great chance one-on-one with Parma goalkeeper Zion Suzuki, six minutes after Thuram lashed home his 10th league goal of the season.

France attacker Thuram was born in Parma where his father Lilian played for five seasons, winning the UEFA

### Football: Everton vs Liverpool postponed

The Merseyside derby between Everton and Liverpool was postponed on Saturday because of adverse weather. The Premier League match was due to kick off at 12.30 p.m. U.K. time. But Everton stated 8.34 a.m. to say it would not go ahead. Rain, wind, and flood warnings have been issued by the Met Office in parts of the U.K —*PTI*

# We are not a massive team, says Man Utd manager

MANCHESTER, 7 DEC

Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim has claimed that his side is 'not a massive team' and only a 'massive club'.

United has shown improvement since Erik ten Hag's dismissal on 28 October. However, Wednesday's 2-0 loss to Arsenal, coupled with other results, has seen them move up just one spot to 13th in the Premier League standings since Ten Hag's departure.

Amorim, whose side faces Nottingham Forest on Saturday, acknowledged that Arsenal was the superior team and described the defeat as a reality check.

"That is very clear. We are a massive club but we are not a massive team. We know it, so there is no problem to say it," he said.

Amorim, who took charge as United manager on 11 November, insists the club should not lower their ambitions.

He acknowledged that the club's rich history ensures expectations will always remain high.

"We're not one of the best teams in the league. We have to say and think that clearly," he said. —*PTI*